Frantz Fanon at the End of the World? Reading Fanon's Philosophy of History

by

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Abstract

This project seeks to answer two pivotal questions: How does Frantz Fanon think about history, and how might we critically apply his philosophy of history today? In answering the former, I devote the first chapter to a close reading of Fanon's work, arguing that Fanon offers a philosophy of history that is critically concerned with the possibility of establishing a universal human history. I illustrate that Fanon understands the violence and dehumanization of anti-Black racism and colonialism as barriers to this possibility, and as such he is concerned with establishing the material conditions where a move to the universal might be ponderable. However, I argue that while we can illustrate a certain dialectical consistency in Fanon's approach to the situations he was confronting, it is worth drawing some critical distinctions between the problems of anti-Black racism and colonialism in Fanon's work. I take this argument further in the second chapter, where I turn to three contemporary readings of Fanon: Ato Sekyi-Otu's *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience*, Glen Coulthard's *Red Skin, White Masks*, and Frank Wilderson III's *Red, White & Black.* I argue that while Sekyi-Otu and Coulthard bring important critical insight to bear on Fanon's work, they focus on the form of his dialectic at the expense of disentangling his problematics. As a useful corrective to this move, I argue that Wilderson's grounding of Fanon in the history and afterlife of enslavement offers a way of thinking about the more intractable problems of considering universal history in Fanon's work.

For
Marc-Alexandre Chartrand
(1989-2013)

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Introduction

The end of the world, by Jove.

– Frantz Fanon

Frantz Omar Fanon was intimately acquainted with the lies of Europe's History. A frustrated universalist himself, he knew this history sought at once to define him, but also position him fundamentally outside of it. While he never abandoned the dream of a writing a new, genuinely universal human history, Fanon saw this as a possibility that could only be achieved by breaking the European myth and writing a new history of struggle. In a world where "the colonist makes history," he writes, "the immobility to which the colonized subject is condemned can be challenged only if he decides to put an end to the history of colonization […] in order to bring to life the […] the history of decolonization."[1] For Fanon, the question of (re)entering history is thus unachievable through a resurrection of the past, but only by rupture. Indeed, at one point in *Black Skin, White Masks*, he asserts it requires nothing less than "the end of the world, by Jove."[2]

Fanon's writings deal with two over-arching themes: anti-racism and anti-colonialism. While the world has changed profoundly since Fanon's death in 1961, it is clear that these problems have not disappeared, with antiblackness and colonialism continuing to shape our world as well. Given the historicity of Fanon's analysis, it is worth revisiting how he understands history, what shapes historical movement, and how this philosophy of history might inform contemporary turns to Fanon's thought. To this end, this thesis makes two central arguments. Turning to Fanon himself, I first argue that he offers an open-ended, dialectical, philosophy of history that is concerning with establishing the material conditions for a truly universal world history. However, we can see in Fanon's work that this potential universal can only be achieved by "the end of the world," a moment of rupture unaccountable to dialectical higher purpose. Second, turning to three contemporary readers of Fanon, I argue that while the *form* of Fanon's thinking about history may remain consistent, we should pay close attention to differences

[1] Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth,* trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 15.
[2] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 194.

between the *problems* of colonialism and anti-Black racism to which he applies this dialectical lens. I argue here that to read Fanon as a theorist of what Saidiya Hartman calls "the afterlife of slavery," rather than as a "postcolonial" thinker, offers an important return to the more intractable problems of establishing universal history. [3]

As this thesis will demonstrate, Fanon's work reveals a profoundly difficult and at times seemingly contradictory relationship to the past. At times, he wishes to distance himself from history entirely, writing, "I am not a prisoner of History. I must not look for the meaning of my destiny in that direction."[4] Yet temporality remains a critical concern, and an important thread running across his work. For instance, Fanon asserts from the outset of *Black Skin, White Masks* that "Every human problem cries out to be considered on the basis of time, the ideal being that the present always serves to build the future."[5] Likewise, in *Wretched of the Earth*, time and history remain integral to his thought, as when he insists that "Decolonization, as we know it, is an historical process: In other words, it can only be understood, it can only find its significance and become self coherent insofar as we can discern the history-making movement which gives it form and substance."[6] As these claims make clear, Fanon's analysis of decolonization and what he calls "disalienation" from racism are deeply informed by a historical understanding contemporary readers of Fanon would be remiss to neglect.[7] Recognizing himself as an antagonist to Europe's mythologies, Fanon likewise asserts that his situation cannot be clarified through recourse to ontology that pays no attention to "lived experience."[8] It is in many ways this *failure* to account for the lived experience of Black and colonized subjects, as well the violence that undergirds the "Human" project, that gives lie to the false universalism of White History. Indeed, Fanon takes this so far as to say that "*any ontology is made impossible in a colonized and acculturated society.*"[9] In light of this insistence on the gravity of lived experience, it is useful to offer some important biographical context before proceeding further.

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[3] Saidiya Hartman, *Lose your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux: 2007), 6.
[4] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 204.
[5] Ibid., xvi.
[6] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*., 2.
[7] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*., 20.
[8] Ibid., 90.
[9] Ibid., 89. Emphasis added.

Biography & Influence

From his birth in 1925 in the French colony of Martinique, to his untimely death from leukemia in Maryland in 1961, Fanon's brief life was profoundly shaped by anti-colonial and anti-racist struggle. Born to a Black middle-class family in Fort-de-France, Fanon was just three generations removed from slavery.[10] The trajectory of Fanon's work was organized was deeply shaped by the intellectual life of Martinique. Particularly influential was the mentorship of his *lycée* teacher Aimé Césaire, a poet, essayist, and politician who become a central figure in the négritude movement. An artistic and literary philosophy driven by Caribbean and African intellectuals in France in the 1930s, négritude attempted to affirm a positive sense of Black identity by, in part, recuperating and championing a common African culture and history. As Lewis Gordon aptly puts it, "[n]égritude was a literary theoretical response to antiblack racism which posited a unique black soul that was a source and function of a unique black reality of intrinsically black values."[11] As will become clearer through the rest of this project, Fanon's work remained in critical dialogue with négritude across his career.

Fanon's most visceral first encounter with racism came when he volunteered for the Free French army in World War II, where even as a liberator he was forced to confront the fact that he was not entirely accepted as the Frenchman he had believed himself to be.[12] Despite this experience, Fanon later returned to France to train as a psychiatrist at the University of Lyon, where he wrote his first book, *Black Skin, White Masks*. A deeply personal text, initially rejected as his doctoral dissertation in 1952, *Black Skin, White Masks* addresses anti-Black racism through wide-ranging engagement with Césaire and the négritude movement as well as French existentialist thought (particularly Jean-Paul Sartre, and through Sartre, Hegel). The work also strongly reflects Fanon's psychiatric training, and deals extensively with psychoanalytic theory to understand and combat the "inferiority complex" fostered by racism.[13]

As a practicing psychiatrist Fanon eventually found work at the Blida-Joinville Psychiatric Hospital in French-occupied Algeria. When the Algerian revolution broke out only a

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[10] Fanon's paternal great-grandfather was the son of an enslaved man of African descent. David Macey, *Frantz Fanon: A Biography*, (New York: Picador, 2000), 48.
[11] Lewis Gordon, *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man: An Essay on Philosophy and the Human Sciences,* (London: Routledge, 1995), 31.
[12] Gordon, *What Fanon Said: A Philosophical Introduction to his Life and Thought*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 12.
[13] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, xiv.

year after Fanon's arrival in 1953, he soon found himself swept up in the struggle through contacts with the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) he had made at the hospital, and began covertly treating Algerian resistance fighters. Fanon eventually resigned his position at the hospital and began working more actively with the liberation movement, becoming a key figure in the FLN. Following expulsion from Algeria in 1957, Fanon soon rejoined the leadership in exile in Tunis, where he wrote for the *El Moudjahid* resistance newspaper, among other activities including providing medical and military trailing, organizing supplies, and strategic planning.[14] Fanon's Algerian experience was to deeply inform the rest of his work. *A Dying Colonialism,* written in 1959, is specifically devoted to the dynamics of the Algerian revolution, as is more clearly apparent in its original French title: *L'an V de la révolution algerienne.* In 1960 Fanon was appointed as Ambassador to Ghana by the provisional government, and also spent months travelling across West Africa, making contacts and looking into the opening of new supply routes across the Sahara. Sudden illness brought him back to Tunis, where he completed *Wretched of the Earth*, perhaps his best known work, in (reputedly) only ten weeks with the help of his wife Josie, who transcribed much of his writing.[15] With the Algerian struggle as its most immediate reference, *Wretched of the Earth* captured the wave of anti-colonial liberation struggles unfolding across Africa at the time, situating them as a broader movement for human liberation, concluding: "The Third World is today facing Europe as one colossal mass whose project must be to try and solve the problems this Europe was incapable of finding the answers to."[16] Fanon never did see his momentous final work published, but succumbed to leukemia after travelling to the United States for treatment on the advice of Soviet physicians.

In his brief 36 years Fanon left an astounding legacy of intellectual vigour and political commitment that continues to inspire revolutionary activists and scholars generations later. Despite Fanon's insistence that "I am resolutely a man of my time," it is clear that for many Fanon continues to speak to the *present* with a palpable urgency.[17] An unapologetically heterodox thinker, Fanon's work has travelled widely over the years, far from the Battle of Algiers or mid-century Martinique. While his influence has waxed and waned over the years, it

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[14] Gordon, *What Fanon Said,* 107. Many of Fanon's *El Moujahid* writings were later published in the posthumous collection *Toward the African Revolution*, trans. Hakoon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1967). It is worth noting that nearly all of Fanon's published work post-*Black Skin, White Masks*, with the exception of a handful of essays in this collection, were written after joining the Algerian resistance in 1955.
[15] Gordon, *What Fanon Said,* 111-112.
[16] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 238.
[17] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, xvii

seems clear that his thought has remained present in the minds of some of the most insightful political thinkers interested in challenging and interrogating colonialism and racism. It is fitting that the most immediate impact of Fanon's work has been visible in the thought of revolutionary intellectuals, such as Huey Newton and the Black Panther Party in the United States, or Steve Biko's Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa.[18]

In the fields of social theory and political philosophy, Fanon's thought has been taken up to great effect by political theorist Cedric Robinson, social theorist Renate Zahar, sociologist Paget Henry, political theorist Ato Sekyi-Otu, political theorist Nigel Gibson, political scientist L. Adele Jinadu, Black feminist theorist Tracy Sharpley-Whiting, and Africana philosopher Lewis Gordon. Speaking in very broad terms, these engagements with Fanon have been notable for their sense of situatedness, revisiting his thought in the hopes of further clarifying critical ideas, and to further elaborate upon the struggles his work addressed in Africa and across the Black diaspora. Fanon's work has also been important in the intellectual formation and debates of postcolonial studies, with prominent literary critics Homi K. Bhabha, Edward Said, Abdul JanMohamed, and Benita Parry turning to Fanon's work. While many of these interventions have offered great insight into his work, this genre of engagement has, by and large, tended to privilege the discursive over the political dimensions of Fanon's thought.[19]

Fortunately, a rich body of work has emerged which seeks to apply and critically extend Fanon's thought. Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan and Noël Manganyi's respective studies on the enduring the relevance of Fanon's critical psychological work in the 1970s and and 1980s are particularly good examples of this tendency. The novelist, cultural critic and literary scholar Sylvia Wynter's work has taken up Césaire and Fanon to great effect to rethink our conception of the "Human," while the philosopher and political theorist Achille Mbembe has offered a highly original turn to Fanon's thought to interrogate the constitution of power in the African postcolony. The past ten years or so in particular have seen a veritable explosion of interest in Fanon's work, with his insights informing imaginative new interventions in Africana philosophy and critical theory (Reiland Rabaka), an emergent "Afro-pessimist" tendency (Frank Wilderson

[18] The work of James Yaki Sayles, who studied Fanon in prison, offers an important return to a reading of Fanon motivated by a more practical, revolutionary urgency: James Yaki Sayles, *Meditations on Frantz Fanon's Wretched of the Earth: New Afrikan Revolutionary Writings*, (Montreal: Kersplebedeb Publishing, 2010).

[19] For more on debates over Fanon's place in postcolonial literary theory see: Henry Louis Gates Jr., "Critical Fanonism," *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1991); Cedric Robinson, "The Appropriation of Frantz Fanon," *Race & Class* 35, no. 1 (1993).

III), Indigenous critical thought (Glen Coulthard), Black feminism (Katherine McKittrick), and Marxist political theory (George Cicariello-Maher). This exciting new wave of Fanon scholarship has also seen the publication of some excellent edited volumes complementing a previous generation of collections interested not only in understanding Fanon's analysis, but commenting on how it has travelled and been applied. [20] Recent years have also seen a flurry of new biographical material by Lewis Gordon, Christopher Lee, Peter Hudis, and Leo Zeilig, supplementing the already rich biographies offered by David Caute, David Macey, Patrick Ehlen, and Alice Cherki, among others.

While he does not typically make these kind of lists of Fanon scholars (far from exhaustive as they invariably are), my own road to Fanon has been paved by the novels and essays of the Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. The course of Ngũgĩ's lengthy career has been marked by an enduring insistence on the relevance of Fanon's insight to understanding the trajectory of post-independence African politics, and the necessity of resisting neocolonialism. While this project does not engage directly with Ngũgĩ's writing, I would nonetheless like to briefly acknowledge the impact his work has had, not only on my own thinking, but also surely on that of countless other readers. It is hard to imagine any writer, particularly one writing for a popular audience, who has kept Fanon's flame alive with more passion and diligence.

Project Outline

What Nigel Gibson has called Fanon's "untidy dialectic" of history has not been the primary focus of much Fanon scholarship, yet it seems that it often implicitly shapes the understanding of different thinkers.[21] While some philosophers and political theorists, most notably Gibson, Ato Sekyi-Otu, and Lewis Gordon, do devote significant critical attention to the question of history in Fanon's work, it does not tend to be the explicit focus on their engagement with Fanon. My aim in this project is to pull at the string of history and temporality animating

[20] Works from the other scholars I have mentioned here can be found in my Bibliography. These newer edited volumes I refer to include: Kathyrn Batchelor and Sue-Ann Harding (eds.) *Translating Frantz Fanon Across Continents and Languages*, (London: Routledge, 2017.); Elizabeth A. Hoppe and Tracey Nicholls (eds.) *Fanon and the Decolonization of Philosophy*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010.)
For older collections see: Lewis Gordon, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, and Renée T. White (eds.) *Fanon: A Critical Reader*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).; Anthony C. Allesandrini (ed.) *Frantz Fanon: Critical Perspectives*, (London: Routledge, 1999); Nigel Gibson, (ed.) *Rethinking Fanon: The Continuing Dialogue*, (Amherst: Humanity Books, 1999.).

[21] Nigel C. Gibson, *Fanon: The Postcolonial Imagination*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2003).

Fanon's work to see how it informs not only his own work, but also (largely implicitly) a set of contemporary turns to Fanon. To this end my project takes up three texts in particular: Sekyi-Otu's *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience* (1996), Glen Coulthard's *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (2014), and Frank Wilderson's *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (2010).[22] The three works share a deep sense of political situatedness in their application of Fanon's thought, which they nonetheless take in divergent directions. To briefly ground their political reference points, Sekyi-Otu reads Fanon through the trajectory of the FLN and other African liberation movements, Coulthard through the experience of the Dene Nation and the Idle No More movement, and Wilderson through the Black radical tradition in the United States, particularly the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army. My aim here is not to judge these readings on the basis of their fidelity to Fanon, nor is it even really to definitive picture of Fanon's thought.[23]

Rather, this thesis attempts to make two critical arguments. First, I argue that Fanon offers a consistently open-ended, dialectical, philosophy of history that is concerning with establishing the material conditions for a truly universal world history, but which requires "the end of the world," a moment of rupture unaccountable to dialectical higher purpose, to inaugurate this possibility. Second, I argue that while we can illustrate a certain consistency in Fanon's approach to the situations he was confronting, it would be a mistake to conflate these problems themselves. As I argue via Wilderson in the second chapter, to re-orient Fanon towards the question of slavery illustrates in more depth, and with more unsettling consequences, the barriers to universal history.

The question of whether *Black Skin, White Masks* and *Wretched of the Earth* ought to be treated as two distinct works, or as part of a more consistent project, appears to be a recurring debate within Fanon scholarship. In his recent *Decolonizing Dialectics,* George Ciccariello-Maher argues that "[t]hose who would divide Fanon's oeuvre—distinguishing *Black Skin, White*

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[22] Published more than a decade prior to either of the other texts, Sekyi-Otu's work represents an earlier generation of Fanon scholarship. I have nonetheless chosen to read it alongside the other two more recent works because it offers perhaps the most thorough reading of Fanon's philosophy of history in the postcolonial context.

[23] I should also note that it is far beyond the scope and intent of this project to evaluate the theoretical frames of these respective thinkers in their entirety. Rather, my analysis focusses more narrowly on their engagements with Fanon, with an emphasis on his historical thought. This is most relevant with respect to Coulthard and Wilderson, for whom Fanon is one interlocutor among many, as opposed to Sekyi-Otu, for whom Fanon is his primary subject. For Coulthard's text this means I focus largely on his more critical engagement with Fanon in the final chapter of *Red Skin, White Masks*, as opposed to the preceding arguments about recognition and reconciliation. I also largely set aside Wilderson's critiques of film theory, Marxism, and White Feminist theory.

Masks from *Wretched of the Earth*—often do so by neglecting his decolonized dialectical vision."[24] While I have no desire to neglect Fanon's decolonized dialectical vision, my concern here is the reverse of Ciccariello-Maher's, namely: what we do we risk neglecting, obscuring or obfuscating if we focus our attention on Fanon's dialectic at the expense of understanding the situations to which he applies the theory, and how should this inform our reading of Fanon's philosophy of history?

I go about this analysis in two chapters, with the first focusing on a close reading of Fanon, and the second turning to Sekyi-Otu, Coulthard, and Wilderson. The first examines how Fanon understands the possibility of universal world history in the context of colonialism and anti-Black racism, and the relationship between anti-colonial struggles and the Marxist narrative of historical progress. Fanon's understanding of the role of Indigenous cultures in the historic upheaval of decolonization, and political utility of moves to reclaim history in the service of anti-colonial struggle will also figure heavily in my analysis. The second chapter deals with how Sekyi-Otu, Coulthard, and Wilderson grapple with these issues in Fanon's work.

This first chapter unfolds in four sections, working through how Fanon thinks about historical movement and the possible utility of resuscitating the past. I begin with *Black Skin, White Masks*, focusing on Fanon's engagement with the négritude movement and Sartre's *Black Orpheus.* Here I am concerned with what Fanon understands as a premature attempt to universalize Black consciousness, and what he sees as the the insufficiency of historical arguments in fighting White racism. Turning to *Wretched of the Earth,* the second section contrasts how Fanon and Marx understand the world-historical meaning of colonialism, and will narrow in on Fanon's critique of the uncritical application of Marxist analysis to colonial situations, which has important implications for his understanding of historical movement.[25] The

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[24] George Ciccariello-Maher, *Decolonizing Dialectics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 71.

[25] Lewis Gordon offers a much-needed critique of the tendency to reduce the thought of Black thinkers (i.e. thinkers of African descent not only in Africa, but across the diaspora), including Fanon, to their European interlocutors. As Gordon points out, "Jean-Paul Sartre was able to comment on black intellectuals such as Aimé Césaire, Fanon, and Léopold Sédar Senghor without becoming 'Césairian,' 'Fanonian,' or 'Senghorian,'" whereas Fanon is more likely to be framed as a "Sartrean" or "Hegelian" thinker (*What Fanon Said,* 5). While Fanon's most important intellectual dialogue was perhaps his engagement with the négritude movement (particularly Césaire, but also Léopold Senghor, among others), he also engaged heavily with European thinkers such as Marx, Sartre, Hegel, and Freud. However, we would be remiss to cast Fanon's work as simply following in their footsteps, rather than existing in dialogue with them, and indeed offering a vital and original critique of European thought, to some extent from within this tradition. As far as this project is concerned it is nonetheless important to consider Fanon's work through his engagement with Marx and Sartre, as Fanon's thinking about history is shaped through engagement with both of their works. My

third section addresses Fanon's discussion of négritude as it appears in later work, particularly *Wretched of the Earth,* but also *A Dying Colonalism*, where he appears to be more sympathetic to the movement, despite remaining largely critical of its orientation towards history rather than the present. From here, I will address more specifically Fanon's positions on cultural politics *not* emanating from the intellectual frame of négritude, but from the cultural practice of colonized peoples, the immediate reference point here being the Algerians. The fourth and final section of this chapter will re-contextualize Fanon's arguments about culture in terms of a philosophy of history. Here I will focus on his critique of economic determinism, the dialectical move out of a colonially-imposed Manicheanism, where "good is quite simply what hurts *them* [the colonizer] most," and the meaning of this movement in terms of universal history.[26]

Ultimately this first chapter attempts to weave together two important common threads across Fanon's work, namely the tension between particular and universal history, and his consistent attempts to dialectically ground his work in historically-constituted material conditions without succumbing to an economic determinism. I argue that in Fanon's work "the universal" can only be attained by a moment *not* beholden to a dialectical higher purpose, but must be initiated by a (violent) confrontation on the basis of a particular demand. Initiated on these terms, the possibility of universalism in Fanon's work cannot be reached by *denying* particular experiences and histories but only by resolving these tensions dialectically. This dialectical resolution remains critically open-ended in that Fanon centers the agency of the "wretched," over a preconceived path. However, in setting the groundwork for the following chapter, I also argue that while the *form* of Fanon's thought remains consistently dialectical, it bears emphasizing that *Black Skin, White Masks* does not offer the same kind of dialectical trajectory as his later work. While I illustrate a certain dialectical continuity across Fanon's texts, I also draw some salient distinctions between the situations Fanon is encountering in *Black Skin, White Masks,* and in his post-Algeria writings. These distinctions will become more apparent in the second chapter, where I argue more explicitly, via Wilderson, for untangling some of these threads.

In the second chapter I work through the implications of Fanon's philosophy of history in more depth, turning from my close reading of Fanon to three particular engagements with his

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treatment of both Marx and Sartre is nonetheless quite minimal here, as in both cases I am primarily concerned with how Fanon addresses their work.

[26] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 14.

work. Put into conversation, these three works are useful in gaining some further clarity regarding Fanon's claims about history, tradition, and the possibility of universalism. Here my argument pivots from the question of "how does Fanon understand history?" towards "how should we be reading Fanon today?" with my approach to the latter remaining nonetheless critically informed by the former.

All three readings have different goals in the way they attempt to bring Fanon's analysis to bear on their distinct political contexts. Sekyi-Otu frames his reading of Fanon as informed by the post-independence African experience, and the immediate wake of Apartheid. In this context, *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience* excavates the Hegelian foundations of Fanon's thought, offering a masterful exposition of a "recalcitrant […] discourse of the universal" across his work.[27] In the rather different context of ongoing Canadian settler colonialism, Coulthard's *Red Skin, White Masks* turns to *Black Skin, White Masks* to make a case for the validity and political utility of Indigenous resentment. While he draws heavily on Fanon to critique the liberal politics of recognition and reconciliation at work in the colonial machinations of the Canadian state, Coulthard takes a more critical stance towards Fanon's dialecticism, arguing that Fanon is ultimately unwilling to explore how Indigenous cultures and histories might inform a decolonial future. The final reading of Fanon I examine in depth here, *Red, White & Black*, offers a distinct approach to Fanon's work that highlights the centrality of anti-Blackness in *Black Skin, White Masks*, dwelling far longer the text's unresolved impasses. Drawing attention to the abundance of references to Fanon in this foundational Afro-pessimist text, Jared Sexton notes that "in an important way, Afro-Pessimism entails a certain motivated reading or return to Fanon, an attention to Fanon the theorist of racial slavery and 'negrophobia' more so than Fanon the theorist of metropolitan colonialism."[28]

My approach here will be to first elucidate Sekyi-Otu's postcolonial reading of Fanon, ultimately making a case for a reading we will see he rejects as "epistemological apartheid," but which I think we might productively read as Fanon's response to actually existing ontological

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[27] Ato Sekyi-Otu, *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 19.
[28] Jared Sexton, "Afro-Pessimism: The Unclear Word", *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge.* Issue 29 (2016), para. 13. Negrophobia here I take to mean a fear or hatred of Black people, a critical concern for Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*, as when he confronts the fact that a "lovely little boy" on the train is terrified of him, shouting to his mother, "Look, a Negro!", 93.

apartheid.[29] I argue that while Sekyi-Otu offers great insight into Fanon's understanding of historical movement in the context of the anti-colonial movements, he is too quick to cast *Black Skin, White Masks* in these same terms, neglecting important points of dialectical *discontinuity* in his urge to understand the trajectory of postcolonial African politics. I will then turn to Coulthard's reading of Fanon, addressing his critique of Fanon's dialectic on the question of resurrecting pre-colonial culture and history. I concede that while Coulthard is right to suggest that Fanon's understanding of culture and history does not do justice to how Indigenous peoples understand their relation to tradition and struggle, his argument fails to appreciate how Fanon, particularly in *Black Skin, White Masks*, is grappling with the question of enslavement rather than settler-colonialism. Instead, Coulthard argues that Fanon is simply inadequate on this question because of his dialectical approach to culture and history. By the end of these two sections, it should be clear that both Sekyi-Otu and Coulthard share an understanding of Fanon's dialectic that ultimately subsumes the question of *Black Skin, White Masks* into that of *Wretched of the Earth*. Following my critical engagement with Sekyi-Otu and Coulthard, I work through Wilderson's resurrection of Fanon as a theorist of Black and White positionality, which I suggest raises an important set of questions for how we think about Fanon and history, recognizing that the postcolonial dialectic of *Wretched of the Earth* does not necessarily resolve the question of *Black Skin, White Masks*.

While Coulthard offers a more critical take on Fanon's dialectic than Sekyi-Otu, I argue that both works share some common understanding of how the dialectic might be understood across his work. While I hardly disavow the importance of understanding Fanon's dialecticism, I argue here that in their attempts to illustrate a certain consistency across Fanon's work, both Sekyi-Otu and Coulthard inadvertently subsume the question of anti-Black racism in *Black Skin, White Masks* into the anti-colonial struggle of *Wretched of the Earth*. In his deliberate return to the problematic of *Black Skin, White Masks*, I argue that Wilderson's analysis offers an invaluable corrective to this move. Failing to draw these analytical distinctions might lead to overly simplistic analogies or conflations of 'postcolonial,' Indigenous, and Black experiences in how we read Fanon.[30] To emphasize these elements of discontinuity in his work is not to

[29] Sekyi-Otu, 20. I describe Sekyi-Otu's reading as "postcolonial" because it is explicitly informed by the post-independence African experience. I am less interested in situating him within the field of "postcolonial theory."
[30] These lines are, of course, somewhat blurred, as many African peoples simultaneously fall into three categories. Rather than attempting to draw hard and fast lines here, my point is rather that antiblackness is not reducible to

disavow certain undeniable connections, just as to dwell on moments of negativity in Fanon need not disavow his frustrated attempts to reach a "New Humanism."[31] I argue here for the importance of situating Fanon, particularly the Fanon of *Black Skin, White Masks*, as a theorist of slavery. Wilderson offers a reading that seeks to delineate more explicitly between Fanon's "postcolonial" narrative, and his narrative of enslavement, probing the extent to which the former fails to resolve the latter. Here we see Wilderson offer a much more radical reading of *Black Skin, White Masks*, a text Cedric Robinson once faulted for it's "petit-bourgeois stink," in comparison to what he saw as the more revolutionary, later Fanon.[32] Highlighting the importance of slavery as a reference point for *Black Skin, White Masks*, Wilderson's highly original reading of Fanon offers a new, compelling explanation as to why some, such as Coulthard, might find Fanon inadequate on the question of history.

In this second chapter Fanon's claim that "any ontology is made impossible in a colonized and acculturated society" assumes a renewed importance.[33] How readers understand this claim in *Black Skin, White Masks* seems to be quite important in terms of thinking through Fanon's understanding of moves to reclaim history and culture, as well as the necessity of historical rupture. Where Sekyi-Otu argues that we should not take Fanon's assertion of ontological impossiblity at face value, Wilderson insists that we must for the sake of understanding anti-Black racism. Coulthard, for his part, largely evades grappling with this claim, in a way that I attempt to demonstrate has critical implications for how he reads Fanon. Informed by these interventions, I return to my earlier argument that Fanon is in an important sense concerned with the rupture(s) required to break this ontological impossibility, the point at which he argues it is worth considering the question of universal history in a dialectical sense. I make a case here for reading Fanon as a frustrated universalist whose understanding of the potential for universal history has as its precondition "the end of the history of colonization and the history of despoliation," or in another sense, the "end of the world." [34] Wilderson's rethinking of Fanon's antagonism as that between the "Human" and the "Slave" forces us to dwell more deeply on what this project implies.

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settler-colonialism. It is also worth noting that Fanon himself does not speak directly to the Indigenous experience in the Americas.

[31] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* xi.

[32] Cedric Robinson, "The Appropriation of Frantz Fanon," *Race & Class* 35, no. 1 (1993): 82.

[33] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 89.

[34] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 15; *Black Skin, White Masks*, 76.

While the question of "History" itself might seem somewhat outdated in light of poststructural critiques of totalizing grand narratives, Fanon's philosophy of history is worth revisiting precisely because of the tension in Fanon's work between his universal aspirations and the structures of racism and colonialism which he sees impeding this possibility, revealing the bankruptcy of metanarratives which reproduce and rely upon the relegation of Black and Indigenous subjects *outside* of "world" (read: White European) history, which even Europe's more critical intellectual traditions have tended to reproduce. [35] In this sense, Fanon's philosophy of history offers a way we might think about the limits of traditional philosophies of history themselves, working against the fundamental exclusions of colonial history but without abandoning the *potential* of a universal human history. However, as the following chapters will reveal, first through an engagement with Fanon himself, and subsequently some of his later readers, the conditions for this potential universal remain intractable and elusive, necessitating, through the history of slavery and its afterlife, a re-interrogation of the "Human."

[35] Robert Young, *White Mythologies*: *Writing History and the West, second edition*, (London: Routledge, 2004).

Chapter One: Fanon's Philosophy of History

I have barely opened my eyes they had blindfolded, and they already want to drown me in the universal?
– Frantz Fanon

This chapter will examine Fanon's thinking about history primarily through a close reading of *Black Skin, White Masks* and *Wretched of the Earth*. I seek to demonstrate here that Fanon is concerned with establishing a universal, human history, but sees the structural, dehumanizing violence of racism and colonialism as critical barriers to this possibility. I approach the question first by addressing Fanon's engagement with the négritude movement and Jean-Paul Sartre in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Following the discussion of *Black Skin, White Masks*, this chapter will turn to *Wretched of the Earth* (and to a lesser extent *A Dying Colonialism*) in more depth, to see how Fanon's philosophy of history is illustrated in the context of the African anti-colonial resistance movements. I argue that while Fanon's mode of thinking about history remains consistent across these texts, I also hope to distinguish between the problematic of antiblackness in *Black Skin, White Masks* and that of colonialism in his later work. *Black Skin, White Masks*, I argue, does not find the same resolution that *Wretched of the Earth* does in the postcolonial nation. The dialectics of decolonization do not, it seems, resolve the problem of how Whiteness has been elaborated against Blackness, imagining a universal, but fundamentally exclusive understanding of the "Human." As we will see in the following chapter, it is this antagonism that Frank Wilderson argues leads Fanon to *the end of the world*.

It must be acknowledged from the outset that the question of gender is largely absent here. It is worth noting that Fanon has been a figure of some controversy in feminist scholarship, particularly over the chapter "The Woman of Colour and the White Man" in *Black Skin, White Masks*, where he critiques the Martinican writer Mayotte Capécia's semi-autobiographical novel *Je suis Martiniquaise*.[36] Fanon's criticism is directed at the internalized antiblackness apparent in the protagonist's assertion that "I would have liked to marry, but with a white man."[37] Some

[36] For more on some of these debates see: T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Frantz Fanon: Conflict and Feminisms* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998.)
[37] Mayotte Capécia, *I am a Martinican Woman*, trans. Beatrice Stith Clark, (Pueblo CO: Passeggiata, 1997), 153. in Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 25.

critics have alleged that Fanon's analysis suggests not only misogyny on his part, but a particular hatred towards Black women. As Susan Andrade would have it: "The figural supplement to the European representation of the over-sexed black woman, that of the betrayer of black men, is powerfully articulated in Frantz Fanon's *Peau noire, masques blancs*."[38] While Fanon does not go as far in his analysis of gender as he should, I find the characterization of Fanon as a misogynist over his critique of Capécia unconvincing.[39] Linda Lane and Hauwa Mahdi offer a more balanced and convincing critique of Fanon's analysis of gender in *Black Skin, White Masks*, concluding: "[O]ur readings do not suggest that [Fanon] wants to police black women's sexual desires or damn them as whores or prostitutes."[40] However, they *do* argue that Fanon's "universal" does not include women, suggesting that Fanon not only particularizes women's experiences, but "ignores the implications of patriarchy for their behaviors."[41]

While their critique is a valid one, Lane and Madhi's analysis is somewhat limited in that their attention is devoted solely to *Black Skin, White Masks*, rather than the rest of Fanon's work. In *A Dying Colonialism* Fanon does devote significant attention to Algerian women's experience of national liberation, arguing that through their participation in the struggle, "the freedom of the Algerian people […] became identified with woman's liberation, with her entry into history."[42] Moreover, while *Wretched of the Earth* does not directly acknowledge gendered experiences of decolonization, one could argue, as Madhu Dubey does, that the critical open-endedness and "epistemological impurity" of Fanon's dialectic of decolonization at least avoids foreclosing questions of women's agency in the manner of much nationalist discourse.[43] However, to the extent that much of Fanon's work fails to account for questions of gender and its intersections with race and class, his analysis (and my own) remains admittedly limited.

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[38] Susan Andrade, "The Nigger of the Narcissist: History, Sexuality, and Intertexuality in Maryse Condé's *Heremakkonon*," *Callaloo* 16, no. 1 (1993), 219.
[39] Critically revisiting Capécia's text alongside Fanon's critique, T. Denean Sharply-Whiting offers a robust, but not uncritical, defence on Fanon on this question. See: T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, "Fanon and Capécia" in *Frantz Fanon: Critical Perspectives,* ed. Anthony C. Allessandrini (London: Routledge, 1999).
[40] Linda Lane and Hauwa Mahdi, "Fanon Revisited: Race Gender and Coloniality Vis-à-Vis Skin Colour" in *The Melanin Millennium: Skin Color as 21st Century International Discourse,* R.E. Hall (ed) (New York: Springer, 2013), 179.
[41] Lane and Mahdi, 178.
[42] Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. Hakoon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 107.
[43] Madhu Dubey, "The 'True Lie' of the Nation: Fanon and Feminism," *Differences* 10.2 (1998).

Fanon, Sartre & Négritude

Négritude was an aesthetic and philosophical project that emerged in Paris in the 1930s, centred around a group of Black intellectuals from across France's Caribbean and African colonies, most prominently Aimé Césaire, Leopold Senghor, Alioune Diop, and Léon Damas. Of these four, Senghor and Diop were Senegalese, while Césaire and Damas hailed from Martinique and French Guiana, respectively. While the politics of the movement's various members are not easily conflated, *négritude* as a whole sought to articulate and establish a distinct Black consciousness and identity.[44] As Césaire puts it, "we affirmed that we were Negroes and that we were proud of it, and that we thought that Africa was not some sort of blank page in the history of humanity; in sum, we asserted that our Negro heritage was worthy of respect."[45] Or as Senghor argues, "Négritude is the totality of values; not only those of the peoples of black Africa, but also of the black minorities of America."[46] While sensitive to the movement's historical predicament, and sympathetic to the intent to fight racism, Fanon's nonetheless saw in négritude a *retreat* from the present and future, rather than a return to the past in the service of the future. As he puts it: "this wonderfully generous attitude *rejects the present and future in the name of a mystical past*."[47]

Before proceeding further with Fanon's critique of négritude it is important to consider the historically-defined situation Fanon feels himself trapped in as a Black man. He describes himself as caught in a "historical-racial schema" in which the White Other has defined him through "a thousand details, anecdotes, and stories."[48] He has no control over this history which

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[44] For instance, as Gary Wilder notes, Césaire was more invested in popular mobilization and communism than Senghor, whose interests lay more with the recovery of African civilization: *Freedom Time: Négritude, Decolonization and the Future of the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 276, n.18. For more on the négritude movement see: Abiola Irele, *The Négritude Moment: Explorations in Francophone African and Caribbean Literature and Thought*, (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2011), Donna V. Jones, *The Racial Discourses of Life Philosophy: Négritude, Vitalism, and Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Négritude Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).
[45] Aimé Césaire, Interview with René Depestre, in *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 92.
[46] Leopold Senghor, "Négritude and Modernity or Négritude as Humanism for the Twentieth Century," in *Race* edited by Robert Benasconi, (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 144.
[47] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, xviii. Emphasis mine.
[48] Ibid., 91.

seeks to define him, as it is one that "others have fabricated."[49] In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon describes a strong desire not to be defined by this painful history, and to assert an alternative history in response. But this is made next to impossible by the position he understands Black people occupying – they occupy in the White gaze "a zone of nonbeing."[50] From this zone of nonbeing, Fanon writes the Black subject has "no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man."[51] As Fanon explains, he has no power to define himself, or define White people in the way in which their gaze "fixes" him; rather than as a *subject* he exists as "an object among objects."[52] As such, he insists that "Ontology does not allow us to understand the being of the black man, since it ignores the lived experience. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man."[53] Fanon is thus pessimistic about the possibility of simply arguing one's way into Being from the "zone of nonbeing."

Paget Henry argues persuasively that the zone of nonbeing can be found in "extreme states of ego collapse," moments where Fanon is forced to confront, viscerally, how he is perceived by Whites. A poignant example is Fanon's anecdote describing an encounter with a White child on the train who shouts "Look! A Negro!"[54] Fanon describes how these events occasion a reckoning with how he is perceived in the "unusual weight" of the White gaze: "the Negro is an animal, the Negro is wicked."[55] But the zone of nonbeing, "an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an incline stripped bare of every essential from which a genuine new departure emerge" is more than an *event* for Fanon, but it is an ontological diagnosis of his position relative to the White subject.[56] For what he finds elsewhere is only denial and disavowal: "When they like me, they tell me my color has nothing to do with it. When they hate me, they add that it's not because of my color."[57]

Defined relationally by the White gaze as a consequence of colonialism and enslavement, Fanon finds himself oppressed not only on the basis of this history, but rather by his mere appearance, from which he finds little hope of escape. Here Fanon offers an important response

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[49] Ibid., 100.
[50] Ibid., xii.
[51] Ibid., 90.
[52] Ibid., 89.
[53] Ibid., 90.
[54] Paget Henry, *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy*, (London: Routledge, 2000), 79.
[55] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* 88. Ibid., 93.
[56] Ibid., xii.
[57] Ibid., 96.

to Sartre's argument in *Anti-Semite and Jew* that Jews are oppressed on the basis of the "idea" the anti-Semite constructs of them.[58] In contrast, Fanon points out that Black people have no possibility of reprieve or "second chance", but are "overdetermined from the outside."[59] Fanon also delineates his own position from other foreigners in France, noting that the German or Russian struggling with French on the street nonetheless "has a language of his own, a country," in contrast, he asserts: "There is nothing comparable when it comes to the black man. He has no culture, no civilization, and no 'long historical past.'"[60] This is an illustrative passage in terms of thinking through Fanon's critique of the négritude movement's claims to a Black past. What Fanon is saying here is that the colonial history which creates the division of Black and White subjects, only Whites are *recognized* as subjects with a nation, past, a belonging, whereas he is read by the Other simply as *Black*. As we will see shortly, this is central to Fanon's critique of Hegel's Master-Slave dialectic. Fanon recognizes here that this is not an objective fact, but how he is perceived. As he notes: "As long as the black man remains on his home territory […] he will not have to experience his being for others."[61] In contrast, the White does not have to question their humanity, whereas Fanon notes that he is constantly reminded of the lack of recognition afforded to him. It is, as he describes it, an inescapably corporeal experience, self-conscious of his place in the White gaze, "I existed in triple: I was taking up room."[62] This is the problem of ontology for Fanon, he finds it incapable of confronting this lived experience.

Fanon recognizes the oppression of "his brother in misfortune," the Jew, but understands that anti-Semitism is articulated on the basis of a tradition in perceived conflict with French tradition and history.[63] But in this supposedly conflictual history, Fanon sees at least the recognition *of* a history. Rather than being brought up to believe that his history was at odds with France, he faced only *denial* that his ancestors had a different historical experience than what was supposedly a universal experience of Frenchness, of "our ancestors the Gauls."[64] But the weight of the White gaze belies the fact that this is *not* a universal history, but a *White* history masquerading as universal. While his own historical experience is not acknowledged, "Slavery? No longer a subject of discussion, just a bad memory," Fanon knows that this history still

[58] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, Trans. George J. Becker. (New York: Shocken Books, 1948).
[59] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 95.
[60] Ibid., 17.
[61] Ibid., 89.
[62] Ibid., 92.
[63] Ibid,, 101.
[64] Ibid., 166.

impacts his life.[65] In the "collective unconscious" of White history, he reminds the reader, "the black man symbolizes sin."[66] It becomes clear to Fanon, that the way Europe comes to understand itself as White (and Human) is juxtaposed to Black dehumanization. Black people, he puts it, become the "scapegoat" for a "white society which is based on the *myths* of progress, civilization, liberalism, education, enlightenment, and refinement."[67]

It is also important to understand that at this stage in his work Fanon sees colonialism as having basically annihilated cultures and traditions. Indeed, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon takes this to be a defining feature of what it means to be colonized: "All colonized people – in other words, people in whom an inferiority complex has taken root, *whose local cultural originality has been committed to the grave* – position themselves in relation to the civilizing language: i.e. the metropolitan culture."[68] It is essential to evaluate Fanon's claims about culture and history in the context of his position that any understanding of precolonial culture or psyche is not only impossible to recover or preserve intact, but is essentially unknowable. It is of course also true that the colonizing culture itself is shaped by colonialism, but the differences lies in the *power* of the two, as we will see shortly in a discussion of Fanon's critique of Hegel's Master-Slave dialectic. French culture changes, but still recognizes itself, and is recognized as French, whereas the rupture of colonization on the colonized is such that Fanon argues "the Malagasy no longer exists; […] the Malagasy *exists in relation to the European*."[69] In this context, the concerns of négritude seem to Fanon to be painfully misdirected, as they are trying to recover the unrecoverable, and trying to reason with an Other who does not recognize them as Being. While Fanon's arguments about 'colonized' culture here seem overstated, it is worth considering the particular context from which Fanon is writing, as the descendant of enslaved Africans in Martinique, growing up as he understands it without a cultural reference point outside of France.[70] As he puts it, "the Antillean is a slave to this cultural imposition."[71]

One might say that Fanon forecloses a kind of decolonial future by rejecting the idea that the philosophy of colonized nations might hold answers to some of his questions. Henry critiques Fanon on these grounds, arguing that his failure to take up African philosophy in more depth,

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[65] Ibid., 94.
[66] Ibid., 166.
[67] Ibid., 170-171. Emphasis mine.
[68] Ibid., 2. Emphasis mine.
[69] Ibid,, 77.
[70] Ibid,, 179.
[71] Ibid., 168.

means that "[a]t the same time that it was helping to destroy racist discourses, the linguistic coding of Fanon's existentialism reinforced Caribbean philosophy's overidentification with Europe and underidentification with Africa."[72] Indeed, Fanon is sharply critical of those négritude thinkers who sought to turn to African philosophy. Addressing Alioune Diop's argument that "the metaphysical misery of Europe is unknown in Bantu ontology," Fanon responds, "Beware, Reader! There is no question of finding 'being' in Bantu thought when Bantus live at the level of nonbeing and the imponderable."[73] While Fanon adopts the vocabulary of European existentialism in his work, it is equally clear, bearing in mind his assertion of ontological impossibility, that he sees the European tradition as equally incapable of elaborating his situation. As he puts it, "philosophy never saved anybody."[74] We can see clearly here that *Black Skin, White Masks* is marked by a certain pessimism over attempts to *argue* the case of Black humanity with a racist White society that does not recognize them as such.

In confronting the zone of nonbeing Fanon sees the négritude project as clearly insufficient, and he identifies a number of other problems with the movement. For one, Fanon sees in négritude a simple reversal of a colonially-imposed binary, working reactively within terms already set by the colonizer. In doing so, the négritude intellectuals inadvertently reaffirm an essentialized construction of Blackness based on colonial stereotypes such as rhythm, sensuality, etc. As Fanon puts it, "what is called the black soul is a construction by white folk."[75] Fanon also takes aim at the movement's elitism and intellectualism, prioritizing instead the material struggle of racialized workers. He argues in his conclusion to *Black Skin, White Masks* that the affirmation of a Black past has little bearing on experiences of those suffering the most under "a system based on the exploitation of one race by another and the contempt of one branch of humanity by a civilization that considers itself superior."[76] Fanon's point here should not be understood as an argument that the proletarian struggle outweighs the importance of disalienation from racism. Far from it. Rather, Fanon's point is that the importance of challenging the material reality of racism outweighs that of intellectual disalienation, as when "in June 1950 the hotels in Paris refused to take in black travelers."[77] In the intellectual orientation

[72] Henry, *Caliban's Reason*, 83.
[73] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 162.
[74] Ibid., 12.
[75] Ibid., xviii.
[76] Ibid,, 198-199.
[77] Ibid., 163.

of the movement Fanon sees a misguided emphasis on the past at the expense of the future. He does not argue that there is anything inherently wrong with the study of history, but he does understand the attempt to *assert history* as an *argument* in response to racism as one too easily evaded by the White, who remains impervious to these claims. As he puts it, "the discovery that a black civilization existed in the fifteenth century does not earn me a certificate of humanity."[78] Fanon feels himself trapped by the futility of trying to argue with racism; it can be countered neither rational argument nor a romanticized turn to a lost culture: "they were countering my irrationality with rationality, my rationality with the 'true rationality.'"[79]

Fanon nonetheless recognizes some powerful subjective value in the tactics of négritude, and he hardly dismisses the movement out of hand. Indeed, much of the fifth chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*, "The Lived Experience of the Black Man," is spent describing his initial enthusiasm for the turn to Black history: "In a frenzy I excavated black antiquity. What I discovered left me speechless."[80] However, even beyond what Fanon attempted to deploy as an argument against White society, the subjective worth he found in négritude was soon frustrated by Jean-Paul Sartre's commentary on the négritude movement in *Black Orpheus,* where he frames négritude's project as simply a dialectical stage to be soon subsumed into a universal class struggle:

> Nevertheless, the notion of race does not mix with the notion of class: the former is concrete and particular; the latter, universal and abstract; one belongs to what Jaspers calls comprehension, and the other to intellection; the first is the product of a psychoboiological syncretism, and the other is a methodic construction starting with experience. In fact, Négritude appears as the minor moment of a dialectical progression: the theoretical and practical affirmation of white supremacy is the thesis; the position of Négritude as an antithetical value is the moment of negativity. But this negative moment is not sufficient in itself, and these blacks who use it know this perfectly well; they know that it aims at preparing the synthesis or realization of the human in a raceless society. Thus Négritude is for destroying itself, it is a passage and not an outcome, a means and not an ultimate end.[81]

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[78] Ibid., 199-200.
[79] Ibid,, 111.
[80] Ibid., 109.
[81] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Black Orpheus*, in *Race*, edited by Robert Bernasconi, (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 137. Sartre's essay was written as a preface to an anthology of négritude poetry by Senghor, *Anthologie de la nouevelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948).

While praising the "anti-racist racism"[82] of the négritude movement, and recognizing that Black people suffer a uniquely racialized form of exploitation, Sartre argues here that the only *function* of reclaiming Black identity is to realize a class position. As Fanon sees it, Sartre's premature assimilation of négritude, "destroyed black impulsiveness."[83] George Ciccariello-Maher deftly summarizes Fanon's frustrations with Sartre, noting that Fanon's objections lie "less with the dialectic itself than with the fact that Sartre claims to know the outcome in advance, and that this outcome is European."[84] Fanon asserts that négritude could have existed within it's own dialectic, but this possibility is destroyed by Sartre, who fails to realize that, "consciousness needs to get lost in the night of the absolute, the only condition for attaining self-consciousness."[85] Fanon argues that Black consciousness must realize itself before it can be assimilated, but that Sartre preempts this possibility, marking, as Fanon puts it, "a date in the intellectualization of black *existence*."[86] Where Sartre endorses négritude on the ground of its position in his dialectic, Fanon sees it as no longer tenable *because* of Sartre's intervention: "Without a black past, *without a black future*, it was impossible for me to live my blackness."[87]

With his possibility of a "black future" prematurely foreclosed by Sartre, Fanon's turns on Sartre's attempt to universalize the project of Black consciousness. As noted, Sartre's move is all the more egregious given the European terms of this universalization: "[a]nd then they came *to Hellenize him, to Orpheusize him* … this black man who is seeking the universal."[88] Fanon rejects the idea that his consciousness must be universalized, arguing for his right to exist and define himself on its own terms: "Still regarding consciousness, black consciousness is immanent in itself. I am not a potentiality of something; I am fully what I am. I do not have to look for the universal."[89] Pressing still further, Fanon argues that this move to the universal is basically impossible in the context of nonbeing and the material consequences of this denial of humanity. Fanon is adamant that the disalienation offered by négritude and by Sartre is at best an intellectual concern, and will be impossible to achieve until the objective reality of segregation

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[82] Ibid., 137.
[83] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 113
[84] George Ciccariello-Maher, "European Intellectuals and Colonial Difference: Césaire and Fanon beyond Sartre and Foucault," In *Race after Sartre: Antiracism, Africana Existentialism, Postcolonialism,* Ed. Jonathan Judaken, 129-156, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 137.
[85] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 112.
[86] Ibid., 113.
[87] Ibid., 117. Emphasis mine.
[88] Ibid., 163. Emphasis mine.
[89] Ibid., 114.

and racist exploitation is addressed: "Genuine disalienation will have been achieved only when things, in the most materialist sense, have resumed their rightful place."[90]

Fanon ends his monumental first work with a clear departure from the turn to the past offered by négritude, asserting, "I am not a prisoner of History. I must not look for the meaning of my destiny in that direction."[91] Fanon's frustration here is that he does not believe Whiteness can be abolished by counter-posing an affirmative image of Blackness against it. He insists the problem he is confronting, disalienation from racism, requires a collective rejection of the past: "The problem considered here is located in temporality. Disalienation will be for those Whites and Blacks who have refused to let themselves be locked in the substantialized 'tower of the past.'"[92] Confining himself neither to history nor to Sartre's dialectic, Fanon thus turns to material struggle as the only way to reach this condition: "If the white man challenges my humanity I will show him by weighing down on his life with all my weight of a man that I am not this grinning *Y a bon Banania* figure that he persists in imagining I am."[93]

While Fanon is less explicit about the potential violence of this struggle for recognition as he is in *Wretched of the Earth*, it is clear that he believes there can be no universalism without recognition; and no recognition without confrontation. In his critical revision of Hegel's Master-Slave dialectic, which he grounds in the *actually existing* struggle of Master and Slave, rather than at the abstract level of consciousness, he asserts that Hegel's dialectic involves a *reciprocity*, where the Master desires the recognition of the Slave and the Slave can "lose himself in the object and finds the source of his liberation in his work." In contrast, Fanon asserts "the black slave wants to be like his master. Therefore he is less independent than the Hegelian slave. For Hegel, the slave turns away from the master and turns toward the object. Here the slave turns toward the master and abandons the object."[94] We see Fanon's formulation here offering a critical illustration of how he is able to recognize the White foreigner in France as having a nation and history of their own, but he is not recognized as such a subject himself. Despite the

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[90] Ibid., xv.
[91] Ibid., 204.
[92] Ibid., 201.
[93] Ibid., 203. Banania is a French breakfast product made from banana flour, cereals, and cocoa. The figure Fanon invokes here was the demeaning, stereotypical image of a Senegalese soldier used for marketing purposes. The motto of this "Bonhomme Banania," was "y'a bon, Banania!" an imagined rendering of how an African soldier would pronounce "c'est bon, Banania." See: David Macey, *Frantz Fanon: A Biography*, (New York: Picador, 2000), 29.
[94] Ibid., 195.

abolition of slavery, Fanon argues, the full, reciprocal recognition of the Master was never forthcoming, and as such the Black subject "went from one way of life to another, but not from one life to another."[95]

Spoiling for a fight, Fanon concludes *Black Skin, White Masks* reminding the reader that "before embarking on a positive voice, freedom needs to make an effort at disalienation."[96] He ends with a "final prayer: O my body, always make me a man who asks questions!"[97] The question, and possibility of his "New Humanism" remains here a striving, without a coherent dialectical *escape* from the "unbearable" drama he describes.[98] Following Fanon's move to Algeria and participation in the anti-colonial struggle, his work seems to offer a clearer, if still complex and open-ended trajectory of historical movement. Despite a new emphasis on the importance of culture and history in his post-Algeria writings, we will see Fanon continues to prioritize material struggle over intellectual attempts to argue for the humanity of the colonized and consistently refuses to write off the urgency of immediate, particular demands in the name of a universalism yet to come.

Colonialism in History

In his oft-cited preface to Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, Sartre praises Fanon for being "the first since [Friedrich] Engels to focus again on the midwife of history."[99] Question of "first" aside (as Sartre curiously elides revolutionary leaders and theorists such as Vladimir Lenin or Mao Zedong) Fanon is indeed unambiguous that the violent struggle of colonized peoples, rather than the movements of the European working class, is propelling historical movement, asserting in his conclusion that "[t]he Third World is today facing Europe as one colossal mass whose project must be to try and solve the problems this Europe was incapable of finding the answers to."[100] But in order to understand the role of the colonized as historical protagonists in Fanon's thought, we must first examine the colonial context against which their struggles are directed. On this point it is useful to understand Fanon's response to uncritical applications of Marxism in

[95] Ibid., 195.
[96] Ibid., 206.
[97] Ibid., 206.
[98] Ibid., 196.
[99] Sartre, preface to *Wretched of the Earth*, xlix.
[100] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 238.

analyzing colonialism. This critique is clear from the outset of *Wretched of the Earth*, where Fanon is quick to revise the validity of traditional Marxist categories in colonized societies:

> In the colonies the economic infrastructure is also a superstructure. The cause is effect: You are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich. This is why a Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched when it comes to addressing the colonial issue. It is not just the concept of the precapitalist society, so effectively studied by Marx, which needs to be reexamined here. The serf is essentially different from the knight, but a reference to divine right is needed to justify this difference in status. In the colonies the foreigner imposed himself using his cannons and machines. Despite the success of his pacification, in spite of his appropriation, the colonist always remains a foreigner. *It is not the factories, the estates, or the bank account which primarily characterize the 'ruling class.'* The ruling species is first and foremost the outsider from elsewhere, different from the indigenous population, 'the others.'[101]

Fanon is almost too modest here, as he offers far more than a "slight stretching" of Marxism. While Fanon recognizes that the wave of decolonization unfolding around him resulted "from the multiple contradictions inherent in the capitalist system," and the weakness of Europe in the post-war period, he remains critical of an economically determinist understanding of anti-colonial struggle.[102] Fanon's analysis frames colonialism as a distinctive mode of production, and explains how the European experience of capitalism differs dramatically from how exploitation functions in the colonies. As the passage above reveals, the most salient feature of colonialism in Fanon's analysis is *foreign conquest*, rather than class-based exploitation. As Fanon notes, the traditional Marxist understanding of the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie as the primary social antagonism proves "totally inadequate" in the colonial context.[103] The confrontation here is between two "species," divided by race, dichotomously defined as either colonized, or colonizer. Fanon's point here is not that class is irrelevant in the colonial context, or that colonialism does not seek to exploit Indigenous labour, but that one's position is defined by what race one belongs to: "you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich." In his analysis of colonialism Fanon centers the experience of

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[101] Ibid., 5. Emphasis mine.
[102] Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, trans. Haakon Chevalier, (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 113. See also pages 26-27 of *Wretched of the Earth*, where Fanon describes how the bourgeoisie of the colonizing country begins to treat the colonized population as a consumer market for its goods. In this situation "a blind domination on the model of slavery is not economically profitable for the metropolis," opening up new terrain for anti-colonial resistance.
[103] Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, 81.

displacement and dispossession, both spatially and historically, describing how colonialism crushes one society and imposes another in its place. The colonized world, Fanon explains, is one "compartmentalized, Manichean and petrified."[104] The colonial state is Manichean because it rests on binary antagonism between settler and native. They are not "complementary" but fundamentally opposed and mutually exclusive.[105] The clear line between the colonized population and the colonizer is not one maintained by tacit consent but by the bullet. As Fanon explains, "the [colonial] government's agent uses a language of pure violence. The agent does not alleviate oppression or mask domination."[106]

While Fanon does not distance himself from Marx's analysis entirely, he does put Marx in the position of addressing a particular, European context rather than a kind of universal human history. Indeed, the distance between Fanon and Marx is perhaps clearest with respect to how they understand the role of colonialism in history. While Marx's work does not devote much attention to colonialism, he nonetheless recognizes that imperial expansion plays a critical role in the rise of capitalism. As Marx puts it in the *Communist Manifesto*, "The East Indian and Chinese markets, the colonization of America, trade with the colonies, the increase in the means of exchange and in commodities generally, gave to commerce, to navigation, to industry, an impulse never before known, and thereby, to the revolutionary element in the tottering feudal society, a rapid development."[107] With respect to what this means for the colonized, Marx largely understood the spread of capitalism via imperialism conquest as a process through which "barbarian" nations are brought *into* world (European) history via a universal experience of capitalist exploitation. Prior to colonial rule, Marx asserts these nations did not even really have history at all, but were merely passed from one conqueror to the next with no progressive historical movement. As Marx puts it with respect to India prior to British colonialism: "Indian society has no history at all, at least no known history."[108]

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[104] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 15.
[105] Ibid., 4.
[106] Ibid., 4. While Fanon acknowledges that colonialism can become "more subtle, less bloody" (27) as financial interests gain sway over the military, it is clear that violence remains fundamental to the colonial regime.
[107] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings, Second Edition*. Ed. David McLellan, 245-272 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 246-247.
[108] Marx, "The Future Results of British Rule in India" in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, 362-367 (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 362. We would be remiss to let Hegel off the hook, as Marx's language here is nearly identical to Hegel's in *Reason in History*, trans. Robert S. Hartman (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1997), 76. Aijaz Ahmad points to the pitfalls in drawing solely on this relatively early article in Marx's career as opposed to his later, more explicitly anti-colonial writing. My point here is not to argue that Marxism is *irredeemably* Eurocentric, but

In contrast, Fanon reconstructs the narrative of European wealth accumulation, centering the conquest and pillage of the colonies: "This European opulence is literally a scandal for it was built on the backs of slaves, it fed on the blood of slaves, and owes its very existence to the soil and subsoil of the underdeveloped world."[109] He insists that "Europe is literally the creation of the Third World."[110] Moreover, instead of understanding colonialism as a process which brings the colonized world *into* history, Fanon reveals it to have forced the colonized *out* of history. As he puts it: "For centuries Europe has brought the progress of other men to a halt and enslaved them for its own purposes and glory."[111] With the history of the colonized nation supplanted by the history of the colonizer, the only way for the colonized to re-enter history, Fanon maintains, is to write "the history of decolonization" through struggle against colonialism.[112] The historical immobility to which colonialism confines the colonized "can be challenged only if [the colonized subject] decides to put an end to the history of colonization and the history of despoliation in order to bring to life the history of the nation, the history of decolonization."[113] With colonialism having dehumanized and forced Indigenous peoples out of history, the reignition of historical movement can only come via decolonization. Here we can see why Fanon's philosophy of history is attempting to shape a *new* way of being. The project of decolonization cannot be a refiguration of the colonial, for the antagonism between the colonizer and colonized must be abolished. But on the other hand, nor can it be a return to a history from which the colonized have been displaced. To return to the language of *Black Skin, White Masks*, it entails a revolutionary bound "from one life to another."[114]

It is to the colonized that Fanon argues falls the responsibility of historical movement, for the history of the colonizer is not a universal history. It is the *settler's* history: "the history he writes is […] not the history of the country he is despoiling, but the history of his own nation's looting, raping, and starving to death."[115] The entry of the colonized subject onto the stage of history is achieved through confrontation, through their entry into the 'Human.' As Fanon puts it:

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that Marx's aspiration to write a universal history of capitalism leads him to treat colonialism as a process of *entry* into history rather than a *forced exit,* as Fanon points out. Ahmad, *In Theory*: *Classes, Nations, Literatures*, (London: Verso, 1992).

[109] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 53.
[110] Ibid., 58.
[111] Ibid., 235.
[112] Ibid., 15.
[113] Ibid., 15.
[114] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 195.
[115] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*., 15.

"the 'thing' colonized becomes a man through the very process of liberation."[116] In his infamously Manichean opening chapter to *Wretched of the Earth,* "On Violence," Fanon asserts that anti-colonial struggle is straightforward: the colonized masses wish to replace the colonizer entirely: "decolonization is quite simply the substitution of one 'species' of mankind by another."[117] This is a moment where question of the universal is manifestly off the table, where "good is quite simply what hurts *them* most."[118] While the fight is instigated on these terms, in later chapters of *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon argues that if this reactive Manicheanism is not transcended it will be disastrous for the anti-colonial movement, and for the future of the nation. Throughout *Wretched of the Earth,* Fanon is really describing quite a complicated, dialectical process of struggle and decolonization. In this movement questions of culture figure prominently, both as a motivating factor, but also in defining the form, content, and resolution of the struggle. On this point, it is worth turning to how Fanon thinks about reclaiming tradition and history in *Wretched of the Earth* and his other post-Algeria writings.[119]

Culture and Decolonization

As we have seen, the Fanon of *Black Skin, White Masks* clearly sees limited political utility in moves to counterpose a Black history to the false universalism of a White history, as a means of combatting racism. However, a more sympathetic perspective toward a certain kind of turn to history emerges through in his later work, in which he pays more attention to the "dialectical significance" of colonial attempts to demean pre-colonial history.[120] Where in *Black Skin, White Masks* Fanon is deeply pessimistic about the efficacy of reclaiming Black history, he becomes more sensitive to the importance of cultural resistance in later work. Here he dwells much longer on how colonialism needed to stifle the culture of the colonized, and to write them out of history, and explores in more depth how culture might inform their struggle *back into* history.

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[116] Ibid., 2
[117] Ibid., 1.
[118] Ibid., 14.
[119] Namely *A Dying Colonialism* and the post-Algeria pieces in *Toward the African Revolution.*
[120] Ibid., 149.

Fanon's intellectual preoccupations in Algeria undergo a significant shift from the question of disalienation in a racist society, to anti-colonial struggle. Before proceeding further, I think it is worth drawing attention to the different contexts in which these works were written, and the different prescriptions made possible by their respective problematics. While *Black Skin, White Masks* touches upon other contexts such as South Africa and Madagascar, the work as a whole is centered around the Caribbean experience and the situation of the Black subject in metropolitan France (and to some extent the United States). Fanon recognizes that in this context, "[the Black man] has no culture, no civilization, and no 'long historical past.' Perhaps that is why today's Blacks want desperately to prove to the white world the existence of a black civilization."[121] In Fanon's later work he is writing in a context where the possibility of Indigenous tradition appears more present and available to the colonized population. In contrast, Fanon's frustration with négritude was that he felt he could only deploy it (insufficiently) as an argument, rather than being able to use it to inform his struggle in a more substantive sense. The critical distinction in the Algerian case is the availability of culture and history, and connection to the land, in a way that differs critically from the survivors of the Middle Passage and their descendants, who were not colonized on their home territory, but had their ties to home, culture and kin severed.

This section makes three claims with respect to Fanon's perspective on history and culture in his later work. First, I suggest that Fanon offers a more nuanced analysis of the effects of colonialism on colonized cultures, arguing that they become ossified rather than extinct, as he maintains in *Black Skin, White Masks*. To elaborate this point, I will turn briefly to Fanon's engagement with gender and the veil in *A Dying Colonialism*. Second, Fanon revises some of his critique of négritude, framing it more sympathetically in a historical context as a dialectical result of European efforts to denigrate Black civilization as a whole. Nonetheless the intellectual turn to culture remains somewhat problematic in this context, in that the 'colonized intellectuals' mistake petrified customs for the cultural essence of the people, and fail to articulate their work meaningfully in terms of praxis and national liberation. Finally, Fanon understands that in the context of nationalism liberation, the turn to culture and history emanates from the people as well the intellectual elite, leading him to significantly reframe his analysis. In this moment, pre-colonial history assumes a critical role in mobilizing the people against colonialism and building

[121] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 17.

the postcolonial nation. Here Fanon also offers an important critique of the 'modernizing' tendency of the nationalist movements who condescendingly reject the peasantry's culture. As I will attempt to illustrate here, Fanon's writing on colonized culture is illustrative of how he understands universalism (both as embodied in the postcolonial nation, as well as in an international sense) as unachievable by pushing particular cultures and histories aside, but rather by honouring the particular on its own terms, the point at which the universal might be plausibly considered.

Whereas in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon argues that colonialism more or less completely annihilates Indigenous cultures, we see him revise this argument in his later work. Perhaps the most useful formulation Fanon offers on this question appears in the essay "Racism and Culture," in which he argues:

> The setting up of the colonial system does not of itself bring about the death of the native culture. Historic observation reveals, on the contrary, that the aim sought is rather a continued agony than a total disappearance of the preexisting culture. *This culture, once living and open to the future, becomes closed, fixed in the colonial status, caught in the yoke of oppression*.[122]

It is on this basis that Fanon frequently describes colonized cultures as "petrified," as stuck in response to colonial imposition, rather than able to thrive on their own terms. In a context of cultural ossification, Fanon argues that what appears to be timeless cultural practices are better understood as survival mechanisms in response to colonialism. Colonized culture under colonial rule, Fanon argues, is a culture forced to retreat into itself, asserting that many of the outwardly visible characteristics of cultural originality are merely "abiding features that acted as safeguards during the colonial period."[123] He maintains that while certain rituals foster a sense of kinship with the land and people, they also represent a means of escaping the reality of colonialism, leaving the people "content to lose themselves in hallucinatory dreams."[124] While Fanon attributes this petrification to colonialism rather than an primordial cultural characteristic, at times he veers uncomfortably close to a kind of troubling modernization discourse which treats culture as a problem to be overcome, describing colonized societies as "underdeveloped."[125] He

[122] Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution.* 34. Emphasis mine.
[123] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 161.
[124] Ibid.,19.
[125] Ibid., 18.

does appear problematically unwilling to grant that Indigenous cultures are able to retain much positive substance in the wake of colonialism. While these arguments deserve to be challenged, as we will see in the following chapter via Coulthard, at least Fanon remains deeply critical of the modernizing impulses of nationalists who seek to impose upon the culture of the peasantry.

The impact of colonialism on the colonized culture thus complicates for Fanon any attempts to reclaim culture and history in response to colonial domination, but does necessarily make it impossible. He emphasizes the importance of embracing the renewed dynamism of culture in resistance to colonialism rather than clinging to features defined by the colonial encounter. With respect to cultural political praxis, Fanon is particularly concerned with the relationship between the colonized intellectuals and the peasantry, who continue to practice Indigenous traditions. He argues that the intellectuals follow a similar trajectory to the négritude movement with respect to their understanding of culture. The colonized intellectuals, he maintains, chose to fight on the terrain of asserting and defending a historic culture: "Whereas the politicians integrate their action in the present, the intellectuals place themselves in the context of history."[126] Fanon is willing to credit this intellectual turn to cultural self-affirmation with some political utility, noting that it is useful in severing the "psycho-affective" attachments that colonialism attempts to inculcate in the colonized population.[127] Moreover, he argues that it is useful in providing inspiration and justification for the fight waged in the political sphere.[128]

Nonetheless, Fanon still considers their approach to be fundamentally insufficient, in large part because their intellectual work fails to speak directly to the masses and the reality of the national struggle. Instead, the intellectual class articulates their culture in terms that do not reflect national reality, preferring instead to champion a Black, or African culture. Here Fanon insists that this failure must be understood dialectically. Because European racism denigrated Africans *as a whole*, it follows that once the intellectuals reject their European educations, a total embrace of "African culture" emerges in response: "history imposes on [the colonized intellectual] a terrain already mapped out, that history sets him along a very precise path and that he is expected to demonstrate the existence of a 'Negro' culture."[129] Fanon nonetheless takes exception to the essentializing terms of this argument and its failure to invoke the specificity of

[126] Ibid., 147.
[127] Ibid., 148.
[128] Ibid., 155.
[129] Ibid., 150.

the national movement, arguing that it makes little sense to discuss a global 'Black culture' in the absence of a coherent Black nation or people. As he puts it, their "historical obligation to racialize their claims, to emphasize an African culture rather than a national culture, leads the African intellectuals into a dead end."[130] The problem, Fanon argues, is a failure to pay attention to the specifically national experience of liberation, and the national project formed in the struggle. The "African intellectuals" share only an abstraction. As Fanon puts it: "There is no common destiny between the national cultures of Guinea and Senegal, but there is a common destiny between the nations of Guinea and Senegal dominated by the same French colonialism."[131]

However, the intellectuals that become aware of this dead end and attempt to reconnect with the peasantry also run into trouble. Despite their rejection of Europe, Fanon argues they still approach the Indigenous culture from a European perspective. They do not speak the local dialect, inadvertently exoticize their own culture, and "behave in fact like a foreigner."[132] Their attitude to culture becomes essentially conservative, and they become the self-appointed judges of supposed cultural authenticity on European terms. What they fail to recognize, Fanon argues, is that they have attached themselves to the petrified exterior of a culture that emerges in response to colonialism. In their preoccupation with rescuing and resuscitating an "authentic" tradition, the intellectuals *mistake "custom" for "culture",* and fail to recognize that culture, particularly in the context of decolonial struggle, is necessarily fluid and dynamic.[133] In this context, Fanon argues, "seeking to stick to tradition or reviving neglected traditions is not only going against history, but against one's people."[134]

Fanon's arguments about changing cultural dynamics are perhaps most powerfully illustrated in his essays about the Algerian struggle in *A Dying Colonialism*, which provide some examples of the more abstracted phenomenon he refers to in *Wretched of the Earth.* In these works, he describes how technologies which were once regarded with suspicion by the Algerian population come to be embraced in the course of the war for liberation. For instance, in "Medicine and Colonialism" he describes a dialectical process whereby western medicine, previously rejected in the basis of superstition and its association with the colonial regime, is

[130] Ibid., 152.
[131] Ibid., 168.
[132] Ibid., 160.
[133] Ibid., 160.
[134] Ibid., 160.

eventually embraced due to the imperatives of the movement. Fanon frames this movement as a breaking out of colonial Manicheanism: where once the colonized population rejected everything tainted by the colonial presence, some the technology and resources of the colonial power are eventually productively appropriated against the colonizer.[135]

However, the most interesting dimension of Fanon's portrayal of changing cultural dynamics is perhaps his depiction of how gender relations change throughout the struggle and his discussion of the veil in Algerian society. While Fanon recognizes the veil as a "centuries old tradition," he notes that in the colonial context it is also clung all the more fiercely as a means of "keeping intact a few shreds of national existence."[136] This is particularly the case in response to colonial efforts to break Algerian culture by appealing to women to unveil. In this context, the veil assumes the role of refusing and frustrating the colonial gaze. Here Fanon draws an interesting comparison to the politics of négritude. As he puts it, "It is the white man who creates the Negro. But it is the Negro who creates négritude. To the colonialist offensive against the veil the colonized opposes the cult of the veil."[137] Fanon argues that while the veil is rooted in traditionalism, it is clung to all the more strongly "because the occupier *was bent on unveiling Algeria.*"[138] However, as the resistance gains momentum, the French exhortations to unveil open up new possibilities for Algerian women to participate in the urban resistance, for instance by carrying grenades through the European quarter unveiled without raising suspicion. Here Fanon argues that women's participation in the struggle transforms traditional family dynamics and affords women increasing agency, also transforming the meaning of the veil itself. The question of the veil itself aside, Fanon's discussion is useful in revealing his concern with attempts to deploy a rigid traditionalism against colonialism, rather than recognizing that the meaning of cultural practices changes in the course of struggle. As he concludes, there is "a historic dynamism of the veil that is very concretely perceptible in the development of colonization in Algeria."[139] It seems clear enough that at least some of his concerns about trying to maintain history and tradition are informed by a sensitivity to potentially patriarchal nature of such moves, and reveals some awareness of the ways in which colonialism can strengthen and generate patriarchal social structures.

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[135] See "Medicine and Colonialism" and "This is the Voice of Algeria" in *A Dying Colonialism.*
[136] Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, 41.
[137] Ibid., 47.
[138] Ibid., 63.
[139] Ibid., 63.

Fanon remains at times quite dismissive of Indigenous cultures and traditions, and the value of pre-colonial history. He argues that they will necessarily transformed in the course of bringing a new national culture into existence, asserting that, "[t]his struggle, which aims at a fundamental redistribution of relations between men, cannot leave intact either the form or substance of the people's culture."[140] Yet while Fanon clearly does not believe that colonized cultures emerge unchanged from decolonization, it is important to understand that in a very significant sense Indigenous culture also forms the bed rock of the movement for liberation and the nation that is built from it. The tension between tradition and defining new, Indigenous modernities, between history and the future, is one that Fanon self-consciously does not attempt to resolve himself, but is instead left in the hands of the struggle.

Fanon is deeply critical of the colonially-inherited modernizing impulse of some anti-colonial militants who, fleeing repression in the city, find themselves mobilizing among the peasantry in the rural areas. Their posture with regards to the Indigenous culture, which they understand as backwards and undeveloped, blinds them to the traditions and histories that Fanon argues are the very *foundations* of national culture. Attempting to force the peasantry to abandon tradition places them "into open conflict with the old granite foundation that is the national heritage."[141] It is important to understand that Fanon sees the peasantry as the truly revolutionary class, not only because they are the most marginalized by the colonial regime, but also to a significant extent because they are the least assimilated into colonial culture, and maintain a collective memory of past struggle and pre-colonial history. While Fanon argues that some customs may indeed be ossified responses to colonialism, he also maintains that a deeper sense of culture survives, describing the peasantry as "a coherent people who survive in a kind of petrified state, but *keep intact their moral values and their attachment to the nation*."[142] Ignorant to the *already existing nation* embodied by the peasantry, and trapped in a European understanding of culture, the urban militants attempt in their own way to write the peasantry out of history : "Instead of integrating the history of the village and conflicts between tribes and clans into the people's struggle, the history of the future nation has a singular disregard for minor local histories and tramples on the *only thing relevant to the nation's actuality*."[143]

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[140] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 178.
[141] Ibid., 65.
[142] Ibid., 79.
[143] Ibid., 68. Emphasis mine.

While Fanon is deeply concerned by the possibility that traditional authorities might be easily exploited by the colonial regime, and the risk of internecine, intra-national conflicts in the wake of independence, the only way he sees to resolve these issues is through collective struggle. In "On Violence," Fanon notes that because colonialism encourages tribalism and division, and coopts traditional leadership for it's own ends, the nationalist parties "show no pity at all toward the *kaids* and the traditional chiefs," arguing that their "elimination […] is a prerequisite to the unification of the people."[144] But this is perhaps better understood as a *descriptive*, rather than a *prescriptive* point on Fanon's part, as in the following chapters of *Wretched of the Earth* Fanon complicates this strategy in his critique of the nationalist parties. While he still seems to favour militant over traditional leadership, he faults the parties for ignoring and ridiculing the chiefs. By doing so they alienate themselves from the peasantry, and rather than "plac[ing] their theoretical knowledge at the service of the people" they instead "try to regiment the masses according to a pre-determined schema."[145] The possibility of resolving competing local histories and traditional rivalries comes through forging a history of collective anti-colonial resistance, setting aside past difference for a common movement, and decidedly *not* through attempting to deny or erase local histories or condescending attempts to "modernize" Indigenous cultures. Fanon argues that the movement away from traditional rivalries and competition is initiated spontaneously by the people themselves as the struggle proceeds: "In a state of genuine collective ecstasy rival families decide to wipe the slate clean and forget the past. Reconciliations abound. Deep-buried, traditional hatreds are dug up, the better to root them out. Faith in the nation furthers political consciousness."[146]

While Fanon is attempting to claim a universal nation, one that does not privilege one particular group or people over another, it is not one that can be achieved by denying particular, local histories, but rather by forging a collective struggle. There is a strong sense in which resolution of the movement is an affirmation of culture, but one in which is reached organically through violent struggle, not through any imposed attempts to 'transcend' culture. As Fanon argues, "[t]he development and internal progression of the actual struggle expand the number of directions in which culture can go and hint at new possibilities."[147] The difficult navigation

[144] Ibid., 51.
[145] Ibid., 68.
[146] Ibid., 83.
[147] Ibid., 178.

between "tradition" and the future course of the postcolonial nation is therefore not an imposed process, but one worked out in the course of the people's coming to consciousness through resistance to colonialism. Through this movement, Fanon argues, traditional governing structures actually assume an integral role in the struggle and of the future nation which emerges from it. As the struggle proceeds, he argues, "traditional institutions are *reinforced, expanded, and sometimes literally transformed*."[148] This should complicate the view that Fanon is either trying to argue that Indigenous cultures must be transcended entirely, or any arguments that they must be embraced uncritically.

Reigniting Historical Movement

While Fanon understands the importance of tradition and history more generously in his post-Algeria writings, he continues to prioritize material struggle grounded in present conditions over an intellectual turn to the past. Resuscitating history may be useful in encouraging the people, but Fanon nonetheless insists that: "You can talk about anything you like, but when it comes to talking about that one thing in a man's life that involves opening up new horizons, enlightening your country and standing tall alongside your own people, then muscle power is required."[149] The only way in which culture can truly thrive, Fanon argues, is through the struggle for national liberation: "The arrival of the colonist signified syncretically the death of indigenous society, cultural lethargy, and petrification of the individual. For the colonized, life can only materialize from the rotting cadaver of the colonist."[150] Fighting solely on the terrain of history is wholly insufficient, even for the disalienation of the intellectual. While Fanon clearly understands that decolonization is also a cultural phenomenon, full cultural decolonization can only follow national liberation. It is only once the "authentic liberation struggle" has prevailed, Fanon argues, that "there is an effective eradication of the superstructure borrowed by these intellectuals from the colonialist bourgeoisie circles."[151] To this end, Fanon is clearly trying to shake the intellectuals out of their preoccupations with history and to ground their actions in

[148] Ibid., 92-93. Emphasis mine.
[149] Ibid., 167.
[150] Ibid., 50.
[151] Ibid., 11.

present material conditions. He is also arguing that the transformation of culture is not in any sense pre-ordained, but is critically, and dialectically open.

While Fanon is particularly infamous for his violent and Manichean framing of colonialism and decolonization, it is worth underscoring that the violent response to colonial Manicheanism is only the inaugural moment of the struggle. It is essential to understand the dialectical significance of the movement for national liberation beyond its initial Manichean terms, and Fanon suggests that fostering a historical consciousness is vital for breaking out of this moment. Of course, at first, Fanon asserts that: "The work of the colonist is to make even dreams of liberty impossible for the colonized. The work of the colonized is to imagine every possible method for annihilating the colonist."[152] Yet while the fight is necessarily instigated on these terms, Fanon offers countless warnings to the liberation movements about remaining trapped in this view. This moment plays an important role in propelling, through violence, "the notion of common cause, national destiny, and collective history into every consciousness."[153] Yet as his narrative proceeds, there is a dialectical move from reactive Manicheanism to a struggle grounded in historical consciousness. As Fanon argues, "by exploding the former colonial reality the struggle uncovers unknown facets, brings to light new meanings and underlines contradictions which were camouflaged by this reality."[154] By "exploding the former colonial reality," the stakes become clearer, and the aims deeper than simply replacing a foreign oppressor with a native oppressor.

Fanon raises two principal concerns about remaining trapped in the colonial Manichean perspective. The first is that the colonial regime proves itself capable of adapting to the new reality of violent resistance, and proceeds to reign in some of its worst abuses. If the movement remains trapped in this view, it can be easily pacified by a colonial efforts to soften their presence.[155] Fanon argues that while violence remains absolutely critical to the struggle, it cannot remain wanton and arbitrary. Violence, while necessary, must be deliberate and organized, not a campaign of brutality for its own sake. As Fanon asserts, "hatred is not an agenda."[156] He argues that an important turning point here is the realization that some Indigenous elements betray the revolutionary struggle, and that some settlers are in fact willing to fight against the colonial

[152] Ibid., 50.
[153] Ibid., 51.
[154] Ibid., 96.
[155] Ibid., 89-91.
[156] Ibid., 89.

government. Whereas previously the movement was solely articulated on racial terms, these nuances begin to be worked out. Fanon asserts that if the movement fails to foster a social and historical consciousness (rather than a racial consciousness), and remains trapped in a cycle of pure violence, the movement will soon exhaust himself.[157]

Fanon's second and related concern is that the failure to transcend the colonizer's Manicheanism has troubling implications for the future of the post-independence nation, particularly with respect to class antagonisms within the colonized population. As has been discussed in the first section, Fanon is particularly concerned with the possibility that the Indigenous bourgeoisie will co-opt the resistance and declare the struggle complete with the departure of the Europeans. This point is summarized quite effectively in the following passage:

> The people who in the early days of the struggle had adopted the primitive Manicheanism of the colonizer – Black versus White, Arab versus Infidel – *realize en route* that some black can be whiter than the whites, and that the prospect of a national flag or independence does not automatically result in certain segments of the population giving up their privileges and their interests.[158]

Rejecting a kind of deterministic logic to the course of the anti-colonial movement, Fanon is also at pains to differentiate the class divisions *among* the colonized population from a European Marxist analysis, spending much of *Wretched of the Earth* emphasizing that class relations in the colonized world are not equivalent to the European experience, neither in the course of struggle nor post-independence. Where Marx understood colonialism as a process through which the bourgeoisie creates a "a world after its own image,"[159] Fanon's analysis reveals in great depth that this is not a mirror reflection of Europe, but rather a terrible parody. As Fanon notes in his critique of the westernized 'national bourgeoisie' of the colonized countries: "[this class] has learned by heart what it has read in the manuals of the West *and subtly transforms itself not into a replica of Europe but rather its caricature*."[160] He reserves some of his harshest criticism for this class, which tends to lead the reformist nationalist parties. Due to the economic structure of the colonies, Fanon argues that this class lacks any of the 'progressive' economic features for which Marx praises the bourgeoisie's historic role in Europe.

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[157] Ibid., 94-95.
[158] Ibid., 93. Emphasis mine.
[159] Marx, "The Communist Manifesto," in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings,* 249.
[160] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 119. Emphasis mine.

Rather, than developing industry or "transforming the nation", Fanon argues this class is best positioned to simply assume the former position of the colonizer, assuming a neocolonial role "as a conveyor belt for capitalism" between the newly independent state and the metropolitan power.[161] As such, Fanon argues that a postcolonial bourgeois stage should be rejected entirely from the outset. Such a stage, he argues, would not only be useless, but entirely unsustainable due to the weakness of this class: "A police dictatorship or a caste of profiteers may very well be the case but a bourgeois society is doomed to failure."[162] It is, however, interesting to note that Fanon does not entirely resign the class as a whole to this failure. Indeed, it seems to be precisely the weakness of this postcolonial bourgeoisie which is in fact "incapable of forming a class," that allows Fanon to suggest a more productive role for at least some of it's members, urging the class to "betray the vocation to which it is destined, to learn from the people, and make available to them the intellectual and technical capital it culled from its time in colonial universities."[163]

The failure to distinguish between metropolitan and colonial class structures is far more than an academic concern for Fanon, but a failure with serious implications for how the urban proletariat and intellectuals engage politically, especially in relation to the peasantry. Fanon describes how the urban classes and nationalist leaders articulate their struggles *within* the metropolitan political structure: "These colonial subjects are militant activists under the abstract slogan: 'Power to the proletariat,' *forgetting that in their part of the world slogans of national liberation should come first*."[164] In contrast to the European context, where Marxism has traditionally understood the peasantry as a reactionary class, Fanon argues that peasantry in the colonized country is actually the most militant class in the fight against colonialism, as they are the class with truly "nothing to lose and everything to gain."[165] In contrast to the peasantry, Fanon argues that the urban proletariat in the colony occupies a "relatively privileged" position, and are able to make some relative gains within the colonial structure.[166] He emphasizes that the peasantry's suspicions of the urban classes should therefore not be understood as the "traditional opposition between town and country," but rather as, "the opposition between the colonized

[161] Ibid., 100.
[162] Ibid.118
[163] Ibid., 112; 99.
[164] Ibid., 22. Emphasis mine.
[165] Ibid., 23.
[166] Ibid., 64.

excluded from the benefits of colonialism and their counterparts who manage to turn the colonial system to their advantage."[167]

Fanon is obviously deeply concerned with the possibility of the revolution devolving into chauvinistic nationalism, a kind of reversal of colonialism which serves only the interests of the nationalist bourgeoisie. He argues that the aspirations of this class to simply replace and expel the Europeans is reflected in the desire of the masses to expel other African 'foreigners,' warning that "from Senegalese chauvinism to Wolof tribalism, there is but one small step."[168] On this point Fanon draws an important distinction between nationalism and national consciousness that is worth recognizing.[169] He is adamant that the nation is not ethnically-based, but rather comes out of a shared history of resistance to colonialism. Rejecting the view that nationalist politics are obsolete, Fanon argues that the nation is the necessary and available vehicle for the liberation struggle. Yet while this nationalism is useful in terms of building a popular, universal politics, he argues that this ought to be a brief stage and that the ongoing decolonial project should not remain trapped in nationalist terms. Once realized, the nationalist project should soon give way to the process of building a "social and political consciousness."[170] As Fanon asserts, "Nationalism is not a political doctrine, it is not a program."[171]

Despite the fiery particularism of "On Violence," Fanon's understanding of decolonization is truly universal and internationalist. But the universal, internationalist project that Fanon envisions, his 'new humanism,' is one that depends on the success of liberation and postcolonial nation-building. He is particularly concerned on the terms upon which it makes sense to consider this universal moment, and argues it would be a failure to give the specifically *national* movements room to breathe before assimilating them into a universal history. In this sense, Fanon authorizes, provisionally, a moment of *total rejection* of everything tainted by colonialism on the grounds of a responsive Manichean logic. We can see some important parallels here with his earlier critique of Sartre, who tried to assimilate négritude too early into a universal project. I think on this point we can draw an important parallel between how Fanon considers decolonization in national and international terms with how he understands the relationship between various cultures *within* the nation. One cannot attempt to obscure or deny the particular,

[167] Ibid., 67.
[168] Ibid., 105.
[169] Ibid., 179.
[170] Ibid., 142.
[171] Ibid., 142.

but rather must work through and integrate the particular into the nation. Fanon suggests that with the success of the postcolonial nation-building project there emerges in tandem an international consciousness, and it is through the realization of these specifically national projects that an "African" consciousness becomes possible. An international move without any national, particular substance to inform it would appear, in Fanon's view, misguided and lacking the material conditions necessary for its realization. As Fanon concludes: "It is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness establishes itself and thrives."[172]

With respect to the success of the national struggle, Fanon raises another important critique of Marx's historical materialism. If the colonial situation is defined more by the political event of colonial conquest and dispossession than it is by class exploitation, than the success or failure of the movement cannot hinge simply on the development of productive forces. In opposing this view, Fanon argues: "Africa will not be free through the mechanical development of material forces, but it is the hand of the African and his brain that will set into motion and implement the dialectics of the liberation of the continent."[173] Likewise, Fanon rejects the argument that the success or failure of a given conflict depends on the productive forces each side has at their disposal. In the context of an anti-colonial movement, the productive forces of the colonized are certainly underwhelming compared to the resources available to the colonizer. On this point Fanon takes aim at Engels directly, who makes this argument in *Anti-Dühring*.[174] Fanon argues that this view fails to recognize the success of guerilla war motivated by the spirit of national liberation.

By rejecting this economic logic, it should be clear that Fanon understands that there is nothing pre-determined about the success of the movement or the outcome of victory, and his exhortations to overcome the racist Manicheanism of the colonizer avoid any appeals to inevitability. While confrontation with colonialism is surely inevitable, there is nothing pre-ordained about the outcome of this conflict. Indeed, Fanon is deeply skeptical of this rhetoric. Rather than serving to encourage the masses, he sees appeals to inevitability as attempts to repress militant and radical tendencies in the movement: "When the militants asked that the wind

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[172] Ibid., 180.
[173] Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, 173.
[174] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 25-26.

of history be given a little more in-depth analysis, the leaders retorted with the notion of hope, and the necessity and inevitability of decolonization, etc."[175]

Rather than putting stock in a logic of history, or economic determinism, Fanon argues that the true historical task of decolonization is centred on the sovereignty and agency of the colonized. While Fanon is clearly enough of a materialist to know that the terrain of the anti-colonial struggle is shaped by economic conditions, the struggle he sees unfolding is a struggle into being recognized *as human*. The task of decolonization and post-colonial nation-building is, as he puts it to "empower the masses to step onto the stage of history."[176] Fanon goes so far on this point to argue that every part of the national project should be driven by the people themselves. He is insistent that even those 'modernizing' projects, such as bridge-building are useless is they are not intended to "enrich the consciousness of those working on it."[177] All aspects of the nation building project, he argues, must be appropriated by and empower the newly independent citizen. As he puts it: "The bridge must not be pitchforked or foisted upon the social landscape by a deus ex machine, but, on the contrary, must be the product of the citizens' brains and muscles."[178] In this sense Fanon's understanding of decolonization is unreservedly concerned with political education and historical consciousness grounded in a movement which historicizes itself. In the context of decolonization, Fanon argues that a historical consciousness, fostered through the fight itself, is vital for breaking free from colonial rule and realizing "the rehabilitation of man."[179] The following framing from Fanon is useful in understanding this issue:

> Fighting for the freedom of one's people is not the only necessity. As long as the fight goes on you must re-enlighten not only the people but also, and above all, yourself on the full measure of man. You must retrace the paths of history, the history of man damned by other men, and initiate, bring about, the encounter between your own people and others.[180]

[175] Ibid., 115.
[176] Ibid., 140.
[177] Ibid., 141.
[178] Ibid., 141.
[179] Ibid., 219.
[180] Ibid., 219.

Despite some significant differences which I have touched on here, Fanon nonetheless shares with Marx and Sartre an understanding of universal liberation as a historic mission, and the ultimate end of the decolonial struggle. However, he is more skeptical about the terms on which this can take place. As we have seen, Fanon understands that struggles to challenge racism and colonialism are not, in the first instance, universal in their aspiration. Rather, he asserts from the outset of *Wretched of the Earth*, that the urgency of decolonization, and the violent terms on which this fight is instigated, "fundamentally alters being," and makes a potential move to the universal possible.[181] Decolonization offers a response to the dehumanization of colonialism, bringing the colonized into a community of the "Human." As we have seen, Fanon's understanding of violence, Black consciousness, cultural transformation, and the relationship between the postcolonial nation and the universal aspirations of "the Third World" remain consistently committed to honouring the necessity of the particular demand *not* in service of a dialectical transformation, while also pointing to the possibility of the universal while endorsing the immediate demand on it's own terms. In this sense, Fanon's dialectic remains critically open-ended, rather than totalizing and subsuming the struggle into a deterministic, or even fatalistic logic.

Fanon is clearly deeply aware of the bloody history of European humanism and its false claims to the universal. In the powerful conclusion to *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon argues that Europe actually possessed the intellectual tools to realize this moment: "All the elements for a solution to the major problems of humanity existed at one time or another in European thought."[182] However, Europe proved itself incapable of achieving this task, and instead succumbed to its own conceit. Fanon describes Europe seducing itself by the idea of its own Spirit, maintaining that, "it is in the name of the Spirit, meaning the spirit of Europe, that Europe justified its crimes and legitimized the slavery in which it held four fifths of humanity."[183] Here Fanon indicts European thought as a whole, which in Fanon's view has reached a dialectical dead end, stagnating into a "logic of the status quo."[184] While Fanon does not frame the problem in this way at this juncture, we could say that Europe bought into the myth of White supremacy.

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[181] Ibid., 2.
[182] Ibid., 237.
[183] Ibid., 237.
[184] Ibid., 237.

Fanon's claim that Europe actually possessed the intellectual tools but lacked the will to realize the a project of universal emancipation is perhaps an even more biting indictment than to claim that Europe was wholly incapable of this liberation. This failure is particularly profound with respect to the European working class, who Fanon sees as having failed in their historical responsibility to genuinely universalize their struggle, and were instead themselves seduced by the European Spirit. While the help of the European masses is useful, and even "crucial" in "reintroducing man into the world,"[185] Fanon argues that this can no longer take place on European terms, and an admission of guilt would be well warranted. While Fanon claims that decolonization offers a genuine answer to their problem as well, we would be mistaken here in assuming that he is arguing that decolonization is *simply* the resolution to Europe's question. In light of Europe's historic failure and the hypocrisy of their humanism, the answer from the colonies takes a new form, and requires a "new humanism," a humanism without the constitutive exclusions of its White, European articulation.[186] Fanon is likewise clear that anti-colonial struggle should not be subsumed into a European narrative, it is rather a fundamental break with the past. As Fanon argues, "The Third World must not be content to define itself in relation to values which preceded it."[187]

As we have seen in the discussion of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon's indignant response to Sartre's "Black Orpheus" is grounded in large part in Sartre's premature attempt to assimilate Black consciousness into a supposedly universal narrative of class struggle. In *Wretched of the Earth*, we see Fanon consider the local histories of the colonized nation in similar terms – the nationalist parties prematurely attempt to assimilate the peasantry into their preconceived understanding of the "modern" nation. Finally, with respect to the international context of decolonization, Fanon argues that the nationalist moment must itself first be worked through before a genuine internationalism can be realized. While Fanon claims from the outset of *Wretched of the Earth* that decolonization is "not a discourse on the universal,"[188] it does seem clear the move to universalization is a necessary part of decolonization's resolution. This cannot be reached without first a "will to particularize,"[189] to give substance to the struggle. It is only through the movement's coming to consciousness, particularizing and historicizing itself, rather

[185] Ibid., 62.
[186] Ibid., 178.
[187] Ibid., 55.
[188] Ibid., 6.
[189] Ibid., 173.

than a premature move to the universal without the necessary material conditions in place, that a genuinely universal human community might be achieved.

Despite significant differences between *Black Skin, White Masks* and *Wretched of the Earth*, one important common thread between the two is Fanon's attempt to establish the conditions on which a move to universal history is possible. While decolonization is, in the first instance, a bitter struggle for power that seeks to replace one "species" with another, it ends with a reconstitution of the "Human," abolishing the categories of "colonized" and "colonizer." In this sense, Fanon situates the independence struggles being waged across Africa as part of a broader movement towards a universal human emancipation. Taking his cue from Fanon, Sartre argues in his preface to *Wretched of the Earth* that "we, too, peoples of Europe, we are being decolonized," urging Europeans to support anticolonial struggle to realize "[t]he history of man."[190] Likewise, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, we have seen that Fanon's universal ambitions require both an end to racist discrimination, as well as a turn away from the past.

It is, however, worth noting that while Fanon finds in *the nation* some kind of decolonial resolution, it is not one that necessarily resolves his earlier dilemma. To recall back to my analysis of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon argues that part of his problem in relation to the White is that he is only seen as Black, whereas Whites are recognized *as subjects*, with their own distinctive histories, identities, and belongings. In *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon seems optimistic that this problem too is being resolved, arguing that "[t]o believe one can create a black culture is to forget oddly enough that 'Negroes' are in the process of disappearing, since those who created them are witnessing the demise of their economic and cultural supremacy."[191] However, the persistence of anti-Black racism and White supremacy in the decades after his death makes it unfortunately clear that Fanon was too optimistic on this question. Having established at this point some understanding about how Fanon thinks about history, I would now like to turn to how we should be reading Fanon on history today. The following chapter takes the groundwork I have laid here in place, but turns to focus in depth on three contemporary readings of Fanon that point to how his thought might be productively applied today.

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[190] Sartre, preface to *Wretched of the Earth*, lvii, lxii.
[191] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 169.

Chapter Two: (Re)Situating Fanon

How does one deconstruct life? Who would benefit from such an undertaking?

– Frank Wilderson III

In the first chapter I argued that across his work Fanon offers a philosophy of history that is at once universalist, but understands the necessity of respecting the particular on its own terms. In illustrating this philosophy of history, I have demonstrated that Fanon believes the universal, which we might understand as a human community of mutual recognition, is only attainable through struggle. However, I have also pointed out that the dialectic of *Wretched of the Earth* offers a different trajectory than *Black Skin, White Masks*, with the former not necessarily resolving the latter.

In this chapter I turn my attention to how Fanon's philosophy of history might appropriately inform contemporary turns to his work. To this end, I look at three books which draw heavily on his analysis. Sekyi-Otu's *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience* offers a reading of Fanon grounded in the post-independence African experience. As should be soon apparent, my own reading of Fanon shares many of the same concerns as Sekyi-Otu, who is primarily invested here in reclaiming and exposing a discourse of the universal in Fanon's work. However, I conclude with two critical points which feed into Coulthard and Wilderson. For one, Sekyi-Otu does not really problematize Fanon's understanding of cultural transcendence. In the second section, I examine Coulthard's *Red Skin, White Masks,* which turns to Fanon's analysis in the context of the Indigenous experience of colonialism in Canada, offering a valuable critique of Fanon's treatment of culture. However, I argue that Coulthard misses an essential distinction in his analysis of Fanon, eliding the extent to which Fanon, particularly in *Black Skin, White Masks* (the text Coulthard draws on most heavily) is concerned with anti-Black racism. Finally, I turn to Wilderson's *Red, White & Black,* which reads Fanon through *slavery* rather than colonialism as it's frame. I argue that this reading offers an important way of thinking through Fanon's work today, and points to the more intractable problems of even beginning to talk about a universal history.

Sekyi-Otu: Resurrecting the Dialectic

In *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience*, Sekyi-Otu offers a comprehensive reading of Fanon that seeks to reclaim a dialectical movement towards universalism across his work. As noted earlier, he frames his project as informed by the experience of the "postcolonial world" in which "'the night of the absolute'—wherein Fanon wanted for a while to grant refuge to the agony and the ecstasy of the particular—became the nightmare of absolutism."[192] Against this backdrop, Sekyi-Otu reads Fanon's work as a "dramatic dialectical narrative," meaning he does not take all of Fanon's claims at face value, but instead for an internal dialectic within his texts.[193] By not treating Fanon's *dramatization* of the colonial encounter as his conclusive opinion, Sekyi-Otu uncovers moments of profound insight and nuance in Fanon missed by earlier critiques of his work, including Marxist and post-structural approaches. The radically opposed portraits of Fanon sketched by these thinkers lead Sekyi-Otu to reject their largely unsatisfying and misleading characterizations of Fanon as either: "Black Orpheus or hired gun of the Enlightenment."[194] He also takes aim at Homi Bhabha's appropriation of Fanon as a "precocious postmodernist," stripped of his political commitments.[195] In contrast to these readings, Sekyi-Otu's dialectical approach offers a useful critical lever to reveal a more complete and complex understanding of Fanon's New Humanism, pondering: "Could it be that to be charged with mutually exclusive failings is the surest sign of a thinker's originality?"[196]

Sekyi-Otu also juxtaposes the reading of Fanon he offers in *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience* to his own earlier interpretations. Whereas previously he took Fanon's claims about 'ontological impossibility' in the colonial context at face value, here Sekyi-Otu argues that these claims should be understood ironically. It is worth citing this passage at length:

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[192] Sekyi-Otu, 20.
[193] Sekyi-Otu, 4. Given the force of Sekyi-Otu's rebuttal to these readings of Fanon, I refrain from addressing these works myself. However, for further reading see: Jock McCulloch, *Black Soul, White Artifact: Fanon's Clinical Psychology and Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Homi K. Bhabha, "Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition," foreword to Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto, 1986); and Christopher L. Miller, *Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
[194] Ibid., 44.
[195] Ibid., 45.
[196] Ibid., 46.

> I argued that Fanon's universe was a radically determinate one, that of a colonized and racially subjugated humanity. In that universe, I heard Fanon as saying, ontology is rendered inexpressible. I took literally and at face value the famous words of the climactic fifth chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks* according to which "every ontology is made unattainable in a society that has been subjected to colonialism and its civilization." And I found support for this anti-ontology in Adorno's veto against grounding critical discourse upon "the question of man": "The question of man … is ideological because its pure form dictates the invariant of the possible answer." The point of this invocation of Adorno was to justify a reading of Fanon that would willfully forget the recalcitrant presence in his texts of a discourse of the universal – a discourse that functions as an unyielding if harried interlocutor of the claim of the contingent to ultimacy. *For the necessary condition for making a compelling case for Fanon's originality, it seemed to me, was to secure and insulate the unique properties of the colonial experience from the generic properties of being human; indeed to place the latter in brackets, or rather to erect – irony of ironies – an epistemological apartheid between the two.* As if to say that only in the aftermath of racial and national liberation would other stories (generic human stories) of bondage, conflict, injustice, and insurrection become at all possible. The result was a narrative caesura between "colonial history" and "human history," as opposed to their complex, fugal interconnection.[197]

Here we see Sekyi-Otu clarifying his view that not all of Fanon's statements should be accepted uncritically, arguing that the universal is part of the anti-colonial struggle all along, despite Fanon's insistence that decolonization "is not a discourse on the universal."[198] Presenting much of Fanon's work as satirical response to colonial racism, Sekyi-Otu seeks to recuperate this "recalcitrant discourse of the universal" at length throughout the book. He argues that treating Fanon's work *sequentially* (rather than dialectically) "would make Fanon a race reductionist while the sun shines with blinding clarity upon the empire, and a historical materialist the moment the dawn of independence both illumines and beclouds the map of social reality."[199] Sekyi-Otu asserts that the dialectical treatment of Fanon's work is apt considering Fanon is describing a "movement of experience" towards a "progressive enlightening of consciousness," and the "dissolution of […] absolute difference to which the colonizer and colonized alike subscribe."[200] In this "dissolution of absolute difference" Sekyi-Otu argues Fanon is pursuing "*deracialized* and disquieting understandings of those universals of the 'history of societies':

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[197] Ibid., 19-20; Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), 51; Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1952), 108. Sekyi-Otu offers his own revised translation of the Fanon passage. Emphasis mine.
[198] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 6.
[199] Sekyi-Otu, *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience*, 23.
[200] Ibid., 26.

universals in which the 'colonial context,' for all its undeniable contingency and idiosyncrasy, is fatefully implicated; […] universals to whose peculiar local forms postcolonial humanity must ultimately bring their political judgment."[201] In short, Sekyi-Otu argues we need to pay attention to the *drama* of the anti-colonial struggle in Fanon's work, which already contains the universal.

Colonialism and the Horizon of Immediacy

While Fanon avers that it is an "Aristotelian logic" (rather than Hegelian dialectic), with a clear binary antagonism between colonizer and colonized, that governs the colonial world, Sekyi-Otu emphasizes the Hegelian undertones of the "horizon of immediacy" from which Fanon frames this colonial Manicheanism.[202] The crux of Sekyi-Otu's argument rests on unveiling the movement within Fanon's texts from *apprehension* to *comprehension*, from *antidialectic* to *dialectic*, or from *particular* to *universal*. In his elucidation of this motion, Sekyi-Otu starts from the Manichean colonial world of "On Violence," where Fanon "appears to give short shrift to world-historical reason."[203] Sekyi-Otu revisits this chapter, focusing on how Fanon prefaces his well-known 'slight stretching of Marxist analysis' by noting that he is [l]ooking at the *immediacies of the colonial context*."[204] In the context of this *immediate apprehension* the colonial world appears clearly as a "world divided in two, […] inhabited by different species."[205] Sekyi-Otu suggests that we see a certain self-reflexivity within the text through this frame of immediacy, foreshadowing how later chapters complicate the more static understanding of decolonization presented in "On Violence," the only measure of which would appear to be "quite simply the substitution of one 'species' of mankind by another."[206]

The key to understanding this immediate apprehension of the colonial context, Sekyi-Otu argues, is Fanon's recognition that colonialism is structured around a *spatial* logic of conquest and race rather than Marxism's *temporal* "critical vocabulary" of exploitation and class.[207] In the first instance colonialism seems to operate solely on these terms, overdetermining all other

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[201] Sekyi-Otu., 25; Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 92.
[202] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth,* 4; Sekyi-Otu, 34.
[203] Sekyi-Otu, 47.
[204] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 5; Sekyi-Otu, 51-53.
[205] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 5.
[206] Ibid., 1.
[207] Sekyi-Otu, 77.

divisions among the colonized population. As Sekyi-Otu puts it, "On Violence" describes a "common pathology" fostered by colonial racism "that cuts across all differences of class, gender, ethnicity."[208] He argues that Fanon concedes a certain truth in the equally Manichean response prompted by this common pathology, but insists this truth is "partial and perverse in its understanding of the social world."[209] However, it is following this explosion of racial violence against the settler, "[t]he pure act, a radical deed unanswerable, it would seem, to the austere ordinances of dialectical necessity," that the dialectic begins to reveal itself.[210] In this moment it is violence of the resistance, Sekyi-Otu points out, rather than 'work,' as in the Marxist schema, that informs and initiates the process of enlightenment.[211] While Fanon's decolonial vision clearly extends well beyond the simple 'replacement of one species with another,' this initial moment of *total rejection* seems necessary to inaugurate the dialectical movement towards more profound social transformation. As Sekyi-Otu notes, "Perhaps it is only by heeding the call of immediacy that we can 'accomplish the descent into real hell' without which a visionary politics of radical emancipation loses something of its urgency."[212] However, this "call to immediacy" shatters the "partial reality" of the Manichean racial struggle, revealing other axes of oppression that were repressed by the imposition of colonialism, such as gender and class. It is thus telling, Sekyi-Otu points out, that Fanon notes: "In answer to the lie of the colonial situation, the colonized subject responds with a lie."[213] This responsive falsehood is, Sekyi-Otu argues, an acceptance of the racial terms of the struggle. If the colonial world is one overdetermined by what race one belongs to, decolonization begins on these soon-to-be shattered terms.

Sekyi-Otu draws attention to the point in Fanon's narrative of decolonization that requires "a decisive settling of accounts with the discourse of race."[214] At this moment, the 'Africanization' of the comprador national bourgeoisie is revealed for the self-serving charade it is. Here too are the relations within and between the colonized class revealed to be more complex than colonialism may have made apparent. As Fanon argues, "by exploding the former colonial reality the struggle uncovers unknown facets, brings to light new meanings and

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[208] Ibid., 96.
[209] Ibid., 52.
[210] Ibid., 98.
[211] Ibid., 98.
[212] Ibid., 54.
[213] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth,* 14; Sekyi-Otu, 99.
[214] Sekyi-Otu, 112.

underlines contradictions which were camouflaged by this reality."[215] At this point in the narrative Fanon describes how the recognition that "[s]ome members of the colonialist population prove to be closer, infinitely closer, to the nationalist struggle than certain native sons," is a welcome moment where "the racial and racist dimension is transcended on both sides," and signals an important turning point in the struggle.[216] As Sekyi-Otu notes, "It is no sentimental desire to forgive the Other that evokes and endorses this critical transcendence of the 'primitive Manicheism of the colonizer.'"[217] Rather, it marks a welcome "end to the history of a racist metaphysics of good and evil."[218] This resurrection of historical consciousness is, in Sekyi-Otu's reading, the transcendence of race, and the realization of class struggle, women's emancipation, and a discourse of the universal.

Sekyi-Otu's point is not that he (or Fanon) is trying to diminish the salience of race in the anti-colonial struggle, but rather that colonial racism *obscures* deeper, universal truths and narratives (and never entirely successfully). Sekyi-Otu argues that the extent to which these universal narratives are repressed under colonialism by a racist, Manichean regime of "pure violence" is in large part what makes the colonial context exceptional for Fanon.[219] As Sekyi-Otu notes, "To hear 'Concerning Violence' tell it, the colonial project and anticolonial nationalism—kindred versions of a Manichean discourse—deploy identical rhetorics of cause, time, and action in the service of antithetical claims."[220] Anticolonial resistance, in this reading, would appear to be a clearly antidialectical moment of absolute substitution, rather than a movement with more substantive aims. However, as Sekyi-Otu persuasively suggests, if we do not treat this as a kind of satire of colonialism, it would seem utterly out of step with the following chapters of *Wretched of the Earth*, in which Fanon complicates the nationalist project, attempting to illustrate how it might be imbued with more universal content. Drawing attention to the "standpoint of immediacy" from which the text first captures the brutality of the colonial context, but hints at it's later transcendence, Sekyi-Otu reflects:

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[215] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 96.
[216] Ibid., 95.
[217] Sekyi-Otu, 115.
[218] Ibid., 116.
[219] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth,* 4; Sekyi-Otu, 85-86.
[220] Sekyi-Otu, 51.

> What is the significance of this internal revision of the standpoint of immediacy? Simply this: *that race is the tomb wherein the historical consciousness is interred*, alive; that try as it might, the empire can never wholly erase intimations of possibilities native to the very idea of humanity; that there is life after apartheid—no, that there is life, human, all-too-human life, palpitating within the peculiar institution of apartheid.[221]

This is the crux of Sekyi-Otu's project. By framing Fanon's initial description of colonialism from "the standpoint of immediacy," he argues that the colonial world is not as radically determinate as it might appear. The anti-colonial struggle, which "transcends" the question of race, reveals the division of "species" to be a fiction which has obscured the always-present universal possibility of historical consciousness.

Sekyi-Otu argues that *Wretched of the Earth* is searching for a "theory of transformation" that appeals neither to a kind of scientific Marxism, nor to sheer voluntarism.[222] Equally, he argues, Fanon attempts to maneuver away from Europe's false universalism, without justifying abusive, reactive particularism.[223] It is on this uneasy terrain that Sekyi-Otu guides the reader through Fanon's attempts to offer an open-ended dialectic that at once honours the importance of apprehending colonialism in its immediacy, giving voice to and authorizing the 'provisional truth' of the nationalist moment, without succumbing to an antidialectic which permits no further movement. As Sekyi-Otu puts it, "Fanon is able to honour the rights of particularity as an epistemic and political obligation without sanctioning an epistemological and ethical relativism."[224] Returning to Fanon's "idiosyncratic" historical materialism offers, he argues, a way of understanding where these movements went wrong, without dismissing their failure as inevitable outcomes, but rather to understand how the promise of a nationalist moment of "undeniable legitimacy went awry."[225] Reading Fanon in a dialectical sense, Sekyi-Otu argues, allows us to recognize the contingency of Fanon's endorsement of this particularism, and to appreciate his warnings over the failure to transcend this stage of resistance.

The outcome of Fanon's historical materialism is, in Sekyi-Otu's reading: "a disenchanted and dauntless enlightenment [which exhumes] the critical knowledge of class from the *antihistorical unconscious in which colonial racism and anticolonial nationalism conspired*

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[221] Ibid., 25.
[222] Ibid., 110.
[223] Ibid., 104.
[224] Ibid., 16.
[225] Ibid., 123; 140.

to entomb it."[226] Sekyi-Otu highlights that Fanon's refusal to put faith his faith either in a purely economic logic or in a simple voluntarism makes for a rich understanding of historical change that centers the agency and re-gained sovereignty of the colonized. "The burden of history" is in this sense "the practice of teaching the people a remembrance of their own sovereignty."[227] Despite its critically open and contestable form, Sekyi-Otu insists that Fanon's vision "remains a *dialectic* – that is to say, *a vision of historical possibilities and as determinate prospects not entirely left to the unencumbered freedom and optional decision of the moral subject.*"[228] In this sense, drawing attention to Fanon's critical analysis of colonial and post-colonial class relations, Sekyi-Otu argues that Fanon's idiosyncratic dialecticism offers a "materialist explanation of it's own idealism."[229] As we can see, Sekyi-Otu offers a persuasive reading of the critical *open-endedness* of Fanon's philosophy of history that emphasizes the revolutionary humanism of the anti-colonial struggle, bringing to light the universal that colonialism was never able to fully extinguish.

Sekyi-Otu & Epistemological Apartheid

As this summary shows, Sekyi-Otu offers a compelling and comprehensive resurrection of the dialectic of political experience animating Fanon's work as a whole. His work draws our attention to how "all of Fanon's texts are suffused with the haunting presence of a repressed discourse of temporality."[230] Indeed, the struggle against the "dead time introduced by colonialism" is in an important sense, Sekyi-Otu suggests, a "demand for the resurrection of time."[231] In his detailed illustration of the form and substance of Fanon's dialectic of decolonization, Sekyi-Otu poignantly re-introduces a historical consciousness to Fanon's work that honours his humanist commitments, and illustrates an openness to the possibility of universal history without preemptively foreclosing the journey this historical consciousness must travel. Sekyi-Otu's reading offers an immensely valuable response to those who cast Fanon as

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[226] Ibid., 154.
[227] Ibid., 211.
[228] Ibid., 171.
[229] Ibid., 130.
[230] Ibid., 76.
[231] Ibid.., 76; Sekyi-Otu cites Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre,* (Paris: François Maspero, 1968), 69. However, he again offers his own translation.

either a kind of ethno-nationalist or dogmatic Marxist. However, before I move on to *Red Skin, White Masks* and *Red, White & Black*, I would like to briefly make two critical notes with respect to Sekyi-Otu's reading of Fanon. The first has to do with the way in which Sekyi-Otu does not problematize Fanon's understanding of cultural transcendence, and the second with his treatment of *Black Skin, White Masks* vis-à-vis *Wretched of the Earth*.

My first chapter addressed how Fanon understands the interplay between tradition, history, and class. As I have noted, in an important sense Fanon understands the independence movement as a movement *for* culture, but a new, national culture. On the one hand, Fanon argues that the anti-colonial struggle "cannot leave intact either the form or substance of the people's culture,"[232] but also describes precolonial culture as "the old granite foundation that is the national heritage."[233] Sekyi-Otu acknowledges some duplicity to Fanon's qualified endorsements of cultural nationalism, remaining suspicious of an anti-colonialism "informed entirely by local knowledge" on the grounds of its potentially narrow traditionalism and tribalism. [234] While Sekyi-Otu re-contextualizes Fanon's arguments, rescuing Fanon from the charge that he seeks to trample Indigenous cultures in the name of some Enlightenment project, he never really challenges or problematizes Fanon's vision of cultural transcendence.[235] Rather, Sekyi-Otu draws attention to the challenges of multicultural postcolonial nations, and also to the manner in which post-independence nationalist leaders have abused cultural particularism to justify authoritarian rule, constantly demurring on the possibility of more thorough social transformation.[236] As we will see in the following section, Coulthard's revised assessment of Fanon's treatment of culture in *Red Skin, White Masks* raises an important critique with respect to how Indigenous anti-colonial movements see a turn to tradition not as a transitional dimension of their struggle, but as central to building a decolonial present and postcolonial future.

My second point feeds more into the third section where I take up Wilderson's *Red, White & Black*, and is concerned with Sekyi-Otu's treatment of Fanon's claim of ontological impossibility as a kind of ironic position. While not neglecting the dialectic that follows the rupture, I suggest that Fanon really does understand his world as a radically determinate one, and that an approach we saw Sekyi-Otu earlier reject as "epistemological apartheid" might be

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[232] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 178.
[233] Ibid., 65.
[234] Sekyi-Otu, 167.
[235] Ibid., 95-96.
[236] Ibid., 104.

productively read as Fanon's response to *actually existing (ontological) apartheid*. I share with Sekyi-Otu a reading that understands the moment of absolute rupture captured in "On Violence" as the catalyst that (re)introduces ontological possibility and dialectical movement. In a sense it does not seem to make much difference in the context of the postcolonial narrative whether ontology was possible but obscured, or absolutely impossible until the moment of confrontation. However, while anti-colonial struggles were able to successfully assert their independence, if we take the context of anti-Black racism described in *Black Skin, White Masks*, we see that in a sense this *remains* the "aborted dialectic" Fanon describes in his revision of Hegel's master-slave dialectic.[237] On this point, it seems worth returning to a reading of "epistemological apartheid" that resurrects the problematic of *Black Skin, White Masks* to prominence, one which I think complicates Sekyi-Otu's dialectical reading of Fanon.

Sekyi-Otu certainly recognizes the problem *Black Skin, White Masks* poses with respect to the Hegelian (and Marxist) dialectics of lord and bondsman, noting: "The story of Hegel's bondsman ends with a *refiguration* of his existential vocation. In contrast to this reformism, the emancipation of the racially subjugated will have to be nothing less than a *transfiguration*, a radical leap 'from one life to another.'"[238] Sekyi-Otu's effort to read across Fanon's work dialectically, rather than dealing with *Black Skin, White Masks* and *Wretched of the Earth* on their own terms, leads him to tease out some important dialectical points of continuity between the two texts. However, it also leads him to collapse the problematic of "The Lived Experience of the Black Man" into that of "On Violence," noting:

> Here, then, is a drama of human(!) encounter and interaction in which no norm of reciprocity, not even a negative dialectic of murderous reciprocity, appears to prevail. *Black Skin, White Masks* depicts the peculiarities of this situation by staging debates with Hegelian and post-Hegelian narratives of desire and recognition. Repeatedly the text is forced to conclude, despite the recalcitrant universalism of its author, that the object of its discourse, the colonial situation, 'is not a classic one'; that this situation imposes upon its subjects an 'existential deviation'; and that a signal index of this disabling deviation is that 'the black person has no ontological resistance to the white gaze': the colonized subject is politically disempowered from playing the game of human agency. *'Concerning Violence' says the same thing* when it avers that it is in the formal logic of Aristotle's *Categories*, not

[237] Ibid., 61.
[238] Ibid., 61.

> in the dialectical logic of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, that we will find the open secret of the colonial relation.[239]

Here we see Sekyi-Otu's text recast the confrontation between Master and Slave in *Black Skin, White Masks* as a problem of "the colonial situation" and akin to the narrative of the postcolonial subject. Yet to think through these confrontations dialectically, in the latter we see dialectical movement proceed through decolonization and the regaining of territorial sovereignty, while in the former, as I will argue in the final section via Wilderson, this moment of victory, where the settler leaves and recognizes the independence of the colonized, seems to remain out of reach in the context of the settler colonies of the Americas. Sekyi-Otu's reading is certainly useful in thinking through the dialectics of *Wretched of the Earth*, drawing attention to the ways in which the text offers a "prefigurement of exacting epistemic and political struggles that await postcolonial humanity."[240] However, in his trenchant analysis of *Black Skin, White Masks,* Sekyi-Otu seems to move too quickly past the moment Fanon captures in his critique of Hegel (where the moment of liberation is 'aborted' in the absence of full recognition) to a postcolonial context in which the dialectic is not only inaugurated but proceeds via the success of the liberation struggle. In my final section, dealing with Wilderson's *Red, White & Black*, I will return to this point, probing the extent to which this 'postcolonial' frame has resonance and consistency with the situation of *Black Skin, White Masks*. It seems to be precisely this postcolonial narrative of "Agency lost and regained" that Wilderson maintains is impossible to cling to in the context of what he calls the "Master-Slave antagonism."[241]

However, before I turn to an analysis of how Fanon informs *Red, White & Black*, it will be worthwhile to first address yet another reading of Fanon, namely Glen Coulthard's *Red Skin, White Masks.* Rather than the African neocolonial experience, Coulthard takes up Fanon in the context of ongoing Canadian settler colonialism. While several African nations (such as Algeria, Kenya, and Zimbabwe) saw heavy White settlement, many other African colonies did not, and served a primarily extractive purpose for the metropolitan power. Yet among those that did see considerable settlement, Whites never demographically outnumbered the Indigenous population. In this sense, countries where the settlers never left power such as Canada, the United States,

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[239] Ibid., 71-72. Emphasis mine.
[240] Ibid., 100.
[241] Sekyi-Otu, 207; Frank Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 187.

New Zealand, and Australia present quite a distinct case.[242] Never having decolonized, Canada has instead opted to pursue a politics of "reconciliation" with Indigenous peoples, that seeks forgiveness for "past" wrongdoing. As Coulthard puts it, "in such conditions, reconciliation takes on a temporal character as the individual and collective process of overcoming the subsequent *legacy* of past abuse, not the abusive colonial structure itself."[243] Critiquing this processes, Coulthard draws on Fanon's analysis to make a forceful political and ethical case for the *refusal* of Indigenous people's to reconcile themselves with the colonial state.

However, my primary interest here is Coulthard's engagement with Fanon on the question of culture and history. Compared to Sekyi-Otu, his work takes a more critical stance with regard to Fanon's dialectic. While I acknowledge here that Coulthard raises a valid critique with respect to how *Wretched of the Earth* treats Indigenous culture, I argue that his work makes a similar move to *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience* with respect to how it collapses the problematic of *Black Skin, White Masks* into a more generic narrative of anti-colonial struggle. In this sense, I suggest Coulthard's work is illustrative of the potential pitfalls that come with attempting to read Fanon's dialectic consistently across his work, rather than attempting to delineate points of discontinuity.

Coulthard: Fanon & Indigenous Resurgence

Fanon's influence clearly visible in its title, *Red Skin, White Masks* draws heavily on Fanon to make two central, intertwined arguments. In the first chapter, "The Politics of Recognition in Colonial Contexts," Coulthard turns to Fanon to argue that the liberal politics of recognition in colonial situations, with particular reference to Canada, are skewed in favour of the colonizer, seeking to domesticate Indigenous opposition and preserve colonial structures of power.[244] Coulthard also takes up Fanon in the fourth chapter, "Seeing Red: Reconciliation and Resentment," to make a case for the political utility of Indigenous resentment, and rejection of the state's recognition politics. As he puts it:

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[242] For more on distinguishing settler colonialism from other forms of colonialism see: Lorenzo Veracini, "'Settler Colonialism: Career of a Concept," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 41 no. 2 (2013) and Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide* Studies 8, no. 4 (2006).
[243] Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2014), 108-109.
[244] Coulthard, 40.

> I contend that what gets implicitly represented by the state as a form of Indigenous *ressentiment*—namely, Indigenous peoples' seemingly pathological inability to get over harms inflicted in the past—is actually a manifestation of our *righteous resentment*: that is, our bitter indignation and persistent anger at being treated unjustly by a colonial state both historically and in the present.[245]

Focusing largely on Fanon's engagement with the négritude movement and rewriting of Hegel's Master-Slave dialectic in *Black Skin White, Masks,* Coulthard argues that Fanon is useful in revealing how anger and resentment might be productively mobilized in the service of anti-colonial politics, and asserts that his work offers useful insight into how self-affirmative turns to culture might be useful in terms of breaking the "psycho-affective" attachments colonialism inculcates in colonized peoples.[246] However, Coulthard is reluctant to take Fanon further on the question of *how* a (re)turn to Indigenous culture and history might inform an Indigenous future, arguing that, "In the end, Fanon viewed these practices of Indigenous cultural self-empowerment, or *self-recognition*, as insufficient for decolonization: they constitute a 'means' but not an 'end.'"[247] In contrast, drawing on Mohawk thinker Taiaiake Alfred and Nishnabeeg scholar Leanne Simpson, both well-known for their theorization of Indigenous resurgence, Coulthard argues for an approach to Indigenous culture and history that involves the "explicit collapse of any ends/means distinction."[248] It is this more critical analysis of Fanon which appears in Coulthard's fifth chapter, "The Plunge into the Chasm of the Past: Fanon, Self-Recognition, and Decolonization," that will be the focus of my engagement here, rather than Coulthard's earlier arguments, which remain astute and convincing. While Coulthard raises a valid critique with respect to how *Wretched of the Earth* and other later works treat the value of reclaiming an Indigenous past, I argue here that Coulthard's reading elides the extent to which Fanon is grappling with the particular experience of anti-Black racism that informs *Black Skin, White Masks*.

Rather than drawing a clear distinction between how Fanon deals with négritude in *Black Skin, White Masks*, and his engagement in later work, Coulthard attempts to reveal that:

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[245] Coulthard, 126.
[246] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth,* 148.
[247] Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks,* 153.
[248] Ibid., 157.

> "[A]lthough Fanon always questioned the specifics of négritude based on its, at times, essentialist and bourgeois character, he nevertheless viewed the associated practices of individual and collective self-recognition through the revaluation of black culture, history, and identity as a potentially crucial feature of the broader struggle for freedom against colonial domination. This potential hinged, however, entirely on négritude's ability to transcend what Fanon saw as its retrograde orientation towards a *subjective* affirmation of a precolonial *past* by grounding itself in the peoples' struggle against the *material* structure of colonial rule *in the present*."[249]

Coulthard argues that across Fanon's work his understanding of historical movement (and thus the politics of reclaiming culture and pre-colonial history) "remains wedded to a *dialectical* conception of social transformation that privileges the 'new' over the 'old.'"[250] Taking the point further, Coulthard argues that Fanon's approach is problematic when it comes to understanding Indigenous resistance to colonialism: "When this dialectic is applied to colonial situations, the result, I claim, is a conceptualization of 'culture' that mimics how Marxists understand 'class': as a *transitional* category of identification that colonized peoples must struggle to *transcend* as soon as they become conscious of its existence as a form of identification."[251] In contrast to Fanon's vision, Coulthard argues that "Indigenous peoples tend to view their resurgent practices of cultural self-recognition and empowerment as *permanent* features of our decolonial political projects, not transitional ones."[252]

In some sense Coulthard seems to underplay the *open-ended* nature of Fanon's dialectic, which does not seem to necessarily preclude the move he makes via Simpson and Alfred. As we have seen, in quite an important sense Fanon leaves the terms on which tradition might change in the hands of the anti-colonial movements. Thus while Fanon imagines that the anti-colonial struggle shakes the foundations of the colonial society to such an extent that it both the form and substance of the Indigenous cultures are transformed, this is not, in his view, a precondition for decolonization. The openness of Fanon's dialectic thus seems to offers room for Coulthard to make the turn to Indigenous thought without implying a rejection of Fanon himself. While Coulthard is certainly right to focus on how the positive substance of culture might inform both

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[249] Ibid., 132.
[250] Ibid., 153.
[251] Ibid., 153. This analogy between Fanon's position on culture and the Marxist view of class is somewhat misleading. Marxism treats class as something to be entirely transcended, with the point of establishing a *class-less* society. In contrast, as my previous chapter argues, Fanon's point is not to establish a *culture-less* society, but rather to establish new conditions for culture to flourish (a process which he does, admittedly, believe requires some transcendence of existing culture).
[252] Ibid., 23.

decolonial resistance and the future of Indigenous nations (a possibility Fanon does not entertain, to the detriment of his analysis), in some ways it seems to remain consistent with the spirit of Fanon's work, if not his actual engagement with Indigenous thought.

In another sense Coulthard also seems to elide the extent to which he too is invested in a sort of cultural transformation, in that he is not advocating an uncritical resurrection of *all* tradition for it's own sake. As Simpson argues, quoted approvingly by Coulthard, "*Resurgence does not literally mean returning to the past* […] but rather re-creating the cultural and political flourishment of the past to support the well being of our contemporary citizens."[253] This is particularly clear with respect to Coulthard's engagement with tradition and gender politics, where he appears to share Fanon's concern over how a narrowly conceived traditionalism might perpetuate the subjection of women.[254] On this issue Coulthard recognizes, like Fanon, that what might seem to be 'authentic' cultural practices might actually reflect a kind of invented tradition which emerges in response to colonialism.

Yet while Fanon's dialectic is perhaps more open-ended than Coulthard concedes, he is equally correct to note that Fanon has a problematic view of the value of Indigenous cultures. Fanon indeed frequently uses the language of "primitive" and "underdeveloped" in *Wretched of the Earth* and he clearly overstates the extent to which Indigenous culture under colonialism amounts to little more than "petrified" practices. Coulthard (and others, including Alfred and Simpson) strongly refute these arguments, emphasizing that Indigenous traditions, culture, and relationships to land have always informed Indigenous resistance to colonialism, arguing that a politics of (critical) cultural self-empowerment is not simply the *means* of struggle, but also prefigures the ends and aims of decolonization.[255] As Simpson puts it:

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[253] Leanne Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Press, 2011), 51, in Coulthard *Red Skin, White Masks*, 156. Emphasis added.
[254] Coulthard does not acknowledge his proximity to Fanon on this point, although the chapter "Essentialism and the Gendered Politics of Aboriginal Self-Government" seems to share many of Fanon's concerns over women's oppression and traditionalist politics in *A Dying Colonialism.* It is also noteworthy that the concern over culture seems to share some important overlap with debates over how Fanon treats gender in a more general sense. For instance Anne McClintock argues that Fanon *instrumentalizes* women participation in the service of the anti-colonial struggle, while others such as Madhu Dubey (and Sekyi-Otu) argue that while Fanon does not perhaps devote as much attention as he could to women's experience of national liberation, his dialectic remains open enough to not foreclose these questions. For more see: Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest*, (New York: Routledge, 1995), and Madu Dubey, "The 'True Lie' of the Nation: Fanon and Feminism." *Differences* 10.2 (1998): 1-29.
[255] Coulthard, 159.

> Our ways of being promoted the good life or continuous rebirth at every turn: in the face of political unrest, "natural disasters," and even genocide, Nishnaabeg thought provides us with the impetus, the ethical responsibility, the strategies and the plan of action for resurgence. We have a responsibility to the coming genreations to maintain that resurgence in the midst of an all-out colonial attack and in the more insidious decentralized post-colonial-colonialism.[256]

Négritude Revisited

Addressing Fanon's critique of négritude in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Coulthard recognizes three objections Fanon raises to the movement, namely it's essentialism, reliance on uncritical reversal of colonial stereotypes, and it's intellectual, bourgeois character.[257] However, as noted in the previous chapter, I think it is worth adding and emphasizing a further critique: that Fanon understood négritude as a movement that was trying to cling to a culture that was not only mythologized and unavailable, but was fundamentally incapable of lifting Black people "*from the zone of non-being."*[258] Négritude's historical posturing, in Fanon's reading, is fundamentally insufficient in terms of addressing the 'ontological impossibility' inculcated by anti-Black racism. The question of 'Black culture' in *Black Skin, White Masks* is thus a more fraught proposition in Fanon's view than Coulthard's critique seems to acknowledge (and a relationship that seems to differ substantially from the way Coulthard is able to turn Dene tradition). Négritude's engagement with Black history, is very much in Fanon's view a *mythic and mystifying* relationship to the past.

Négritude's relation to culture and history was one which Fanon felt little living connection to, but one he could deploy (unsatisfactorily) as an *argument.* As he puts, his discovery of Black history via négritude was something he could use to "put the white man back in his place," to respond to the denigration of Black history.[259] Fanon's concern is more with transcending the burden of anti-Black racism, rather than reclaiming a cultural identity from which he has been alienated. In this struggle, he sees little by way of culture or history that he can "assert as a *BLACK MAN"* that has much resonance in response to racism, as he argues his oppression operates not only at the level of culture or history: as he puts it: "I am not a slave not

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[256] Simpson, 20.
[257] Ibid., 142-143.
[258] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, xii.
[259] Ibid., 110.

to the 'idea' others have of me, but to my appearance."[260] On this point, I think we begin to see that the relationship to land, culture and history in the Indigenous and Algerian contexts seems to differ substantially from how Fanon understands his own position in *Black Skin, White Masks*.

While he emphasizes that Fanon's thinking about Indigenous culture remains problematically dialectical across his work, Coulthard nonetheless acknowledges a "slight shift in the dismissive stance […] towards strategies that seek to revalue precolonial history and culture as an ongoing feature of the decolonization process" in his later writings.[261] Coulthard attributes this shift to Fanon's experience in Algeria, "where expression of cultural self-affirmation appeared to emerge organically among the colonized population as a whole, as opposed to being articulated solely among the elites of négritude."[262] The critical point here seems to be that Fanon noticed the Algerian peasantry had a coherent self-identity that existed *outside* of that which colonial rule attempted to impose.[263] In contrast, as Fanon argues with respect to the Antillean situation, he grew up genuinely believing himself to be a Frenchman, without a coherent sense of cultural identity outside that frame.[264] The question of history, identity, and culture is quite distinct for the Black populations of the Americas who were enslaved and stolen from their ancestral lands, as compared to those Africans who remained. Coulthard is right to recognize a shift here, which I agree has much to do with the way this cultural self-affirmation appeared more organic in the Algerian context. However, Coulthard neglects to ask *why* it might be that the Algerian peasantry were able to deploy this practice of cultural self-affirmation in a way the négritude movement (and Black workers in the Caribbean and France) were, at least in Fanon's reading, unable to. Indeed, Fanon's efforts to "assert himself" seem to notably lack the same kind of cultural reference points available in the Algerian context.[265]

Coulthard's argument that Fanon is not particularly useful in understanding how Indigenous peoples relate to culture as the *end* of their decolonial vision is overall sound. As he claims, Fanon's analysis "simply does not provide much insight into either what motivates

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[260] Ibid., 95.
[261] Coulthard, 146.
[262] Ibid., 147.
[263] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth,* 79. As I argue in the first chapter, it is largely (although not exclusively) this distance from colonial culture that informs Fanon's argument that the peasantry is the truly revolutionary class in the colonial context.
[264] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* 126.
[265] Ibid., 95.

Indigenous resistance to settler colonization or into the cultural foundations upon which Indigenous noncolonial alternatives might be constructed."[266] Or Simpson argues, her vision of Indigenous cultural resurgence is less concerned with the critique of colonialism, but the imagining of a decolonial future: "I am not so concerned with how we dismantle the master's house, that is, which set of theories we use to critique colonialism; but I am very concerned with how we (re)build our own house, or our own houses."[267] It is without doubt perfectly justifiable that Coulthard turns to Alfred and Simpson on these questions, adjusting his frame to the past, present, *and* future of Indigenous resistance and resurgence. However, it seems worth noting that this move does not resolve Fanon's problem in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Thus my critique here is not to suggest that Fanon actually has the answers to Coulthard's questions, nor is it to say that Coulthard is wrong to work past Fanon in understanding what motivates Indigenous resurgence. Rather, my aim here is to point to a more interesting, and perhaps more difficult, explanation as to *why* Fanon, particularly the Fanon of *Black Skin, White Masks* might not possess these answers. Where Coulthard attributes Fanon's failure to adequately conceptualize Indigenous cultural praxis to his dialectical intellectual inheritance, it seems that another reading of Fanon might instead emphasize that this move to resurrect tradition has proven more problematic to the survivors of the Middle Passage and their descendants.

Coulthard's engagement with Fanon over questions of culture centers mostly on the chapter "The Lived Experience of the Black Man" and Fanon's engagement with Sartre and the Négritude movement. While Fanon's work as a whole occasionally flits between Black and 'colonized' subjectivity in a more general sense, this chapter (and indeed the work as a whole) deals fairly particularly with the Black diaspora. This is a point worth emphasizing, given that the 'logic' of of anti-Blackness is not quite that of settler colonial racism. At the beginning of *Red Skin, White Masks* Coulthard draws on Patrick Wolfe to point out that: "Whatever settlers may say—and they generally have a lot to say—the primary motive [of settler-colonialism] is not race (or religion, ethnicity, grade of civilization, etc.) but access to territory. *Territoriality is settler colonialism's specific, irreducible element*."[268] As Achille Mbembe reminds us, "Africa […] stands out as the supreme receptacle of the West's obsession with […] the facts of

[266] Coulthard, 153-154.
[267] Simpson, 32.
[268] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide* Studies 8, no. 4 (2006), 388.

"absence," "lack," and "non-being," of identity and difference, of negativeness—in short, of nothingness," both in relation to it's land and people.[269] Thus while antiblackness is hardly inseparable from questions of territoriality, land does not appear to be the "irreducible element" of anti-Black racism, and is certainly not the focus of Fanon's analysis in *Black Skin, White Masks.*

Therefore, I suggest that Coulthard finds Fanon's approach to be unsatisfactory at least in part because he is largely drawing on Fanon's analysis of anti-Black racism to analyze settler-colonialism. Coulthard seems to miss these noteworthy distinctions by focusing his more critical analysis on Fanon's dialecticalism, rather than the contexts Fanon is attempting to analyze. Coulthard's work takes up Fanon in important and compelling ways, offering to a vital and productive critique of 'the colonial politics of recognition,' and also illustrating an important limit to Fanon's analysis in terms of understanding Indigenous resistance. However, *Red Skin, White Masks* also elides a question that contemporary readers of Fanon would be remiss to neglect, and risk further neglecting if we focus on the *form* rather than the *content* of Fanon's dialectical thinking. While Fanon is, as Coulthard demonstrates, unfairly skeptical, and indeed dismissive, of the value of reclaiming culture in colonized contexts, there appears to be, particularly in *Black Skin, White Masks*, a deeper problem he is struggling with. To put the point briefly, settler-colonialism and the the afterlife of slavery are not analogous. While settler-colonialism is about theft of land, Wilderson reminds us that slavery is a theft of life itself. As I argue in the following section, Wilderson's Afro-pessimisist reading of Fanon, which deliberately re-situates him in the context of the afterlife of slavery, offers a more useful interpretation of how Fanon understands the limitations of reclaiming culture and history which does not reduce the problem simply to Fanon's dialectical thinking.

Wilderson: Fanon & Ontological Impossibility

Returning to the scene of the African independence struggles forty years on, Sekyi-Otu offers a reading of Fanon that attempts to resurrect his work as a consistent philosophical project in the hopes of building a fuller understanding of how these movements went awry in the

[269] Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 4.

aftermath of independence. In contrast, Coulthard takes *Black Skin, White Masks* to a context unaddressed by Fanon, making a compelling case for the affirmative substance of Indigenous peoples' resentment towards the ongoing colonial machinations of the Canadian state. Coulthard also points to a limit of where Fanon's analysis might be productively applied with respect to understanding Indigenous cultural resurgence. Both works offer dexterous applications of Fanon's thought to these different political struggles, clarifying their own situations as well as yielding useful insight into Fanon's work. However, both readings of Fanon make a similar move in terms of how they ultimately dissolve the problem of anti-Black racism in *Black Skin, White Masks* into the anti-colonial struggle of *Wretched of the Earth*. In Sekyi-Otu we see this illustrated in the way his work shifts from the impasse of *Black Skin, White Masks* into the apparent dialectical resolution of this impasse in *Wretched of the Earth*, but without returning to or clarifying the former situation. In *Red Skin, White Masks,* I argue that we see this move in the way Coulthard attributes Fanon's critique of a turn to tradition solely to his dialecticism, without grappling with important contextual distinctions. In the interest of expounding a reading of Fanon that pays greater heed to teasing out these important discontinuities across his work, my analysis here turns to Frank Wilderson's *Red, White & Black*, which offers a renewed focus on the question of Black and White positionality in *Black Skin, White Masks*, clarifying what we might gain from an analysis that reads against Fanon's dialectical continuity.[270]

Wilderson's reading does not engage the positive dimensions of Fanon's thought to any real extent, but rather focusses on the negativity of his dialectic. In contrast to Sekyi-Otu, who reads Fanon's claims of 'ontological impossibility' ironically, Wilderson takes this claim very much at face value with respect to understanding anti-Black racism. Indeed, Fanon's insistence that "Ontology does not allow us to understand the being of the black man since it ignores the lived experience. *For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man*"[271] is absolutely central to Wilderson's project. Rather than focusing on Fanon's analysis of colonialism, Wilderson turns to this argument to resurrect Fanon as a theorist of the "structural positionality" of Blackness, which he argues is defined by this non-communicability

[270] Wilderson's project actually somewhat adjusts Fanon's frame to think about Black and non-Black, rather than Black and white; thus in a sense centering *anti-Blackness* rather than White supremacy. His rationale is that other racialized groups are oppressed within a hierarchy of the "Human," in conflict within civil society, rather than being positioned as antagonists outside of it. Nonetheless, he takes Whiteness as his other paradigmatic focus given that "due to its exceptional capacity to escape racial markers, Whiteness is the most impeccable embodiment of what it means to be Human," 45.

[271] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 90. Emphasis mine.

and ontological impossibility.[272] This approach leads Wilderson to rewrite Fanon as an 'Afro-pessimist,' dwelling on the more intractable moments of *Black Skin, White Masks.*[273] Wilderson describes Afro-pessimism as a kind of broad orientation takes an essential cue from Fanon's claims regarding Black 'ontological impossibility,' and characterizes the Afro-pessimists as those who "share Fanon's insistence that, though Blacks are indeed sentient beings, the structure of the entire world's semantic field […] is sutured by anti-Black solidarity." [274] While the immediate references of Wilderson's text are grounded in the African-American experience and the operation of White supremacy in the United States, he extends his argument to a global analysis of anti-Black racism.

Wilderson turns to this Afro-pessimist cluster of thinkers to argue that the paradigmatic essence of Black suffering and oppression operates neither on a logic of exploitation nor territorial dispossession. While most slaves were indeed forced to work, Wilderson insists that slavery is not fundamentally, or ontologically, a question of exploitation and labour. Rather, he argues via Orlando Patterson, Saidiya Hartman and others, "slavery is and connotes an ontological status for Blackness; and that the constituent elements of slavery are not exploitation and alienation but accumulation and fungibility (as Saidiya Hartman puts it): the condition of being owned and traded."[275] The afterlife of slavery, in Wilderson's reading, is the longue durée of social death: the condition of remaining, as Fanon puts it, "an object among other objects."[276] Returning to Fanon's point that "[the Slave] went from one way of life to another, but not *from one life to another,*" seems to assume a devastating new significance when read in this context.[277] While Fanon himself does not articulate the problem of anti-Black racism in precisely these terms (and does suggest that the "epidermalization" of racism follows the "economic fact"), a critical resonance can be observed in his warning that "the worst mistake would be to believe their mutual dependence automatic."[278]

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[272] Wilderson, *Red, White & Black,* 58.
[273] Wilderson credits Saidiya Hartman for suggesting the term Afro-pessimism (*Red, White & Black* 346, n. 9), a theoretical orientation he first elaborates in this work.
[274] Wilderson, *Red, White &Black,* 58. According to Wilderson the Afro-pessimist ranks include: Hortense Spillers, Ronald Judy, David Marriott, Saidiya Hartman, Achille Mbemebe, Frantz Fanon, Kara Keeling, Jared Sexton, Joy James, Lewis Gordon, George Yancey, and Orlando Patterson.
[275] Wilderson, 14; Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
[276] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 89.
[277] Ibid., 195.
[278] Ibid., xv.

In elaborating what he understands as a distinctively Black "grammar of suffering," Wilderson draws a distinction between the violence experienced by other subaltern subjects, and the gratuitous, structural violence that "position[s] Black ontologically outside of Humanity and civil society."[279] In particular, Wilderson turns to the way in which Fanon distances himself from the analogy of Jewish suffering in his engagement with Sartre in "The Lived Experience of the Black Man," arguing:

> Fanon [makes] it possible to theorize the impossibility of Black ontology (thus allowing us to mediate on how the Black suffers) without being chained to the philosophical and rhetorical demands of analogy, demands which the evidentiary register of social oppression (i.e. how many Jews died in the ovens, how many Blacks were lost in the Middle Passage) normally imposes on such meditations. The ruse of analogy erroneously locates Blacks in the world—a place where they have not been since the dawning of Blackness.[280]

Wilderson's concern here is to distinguish between a kind of experiential suffering, and what makes suffering ontological. As Wilderson argues, "Jews went into Auschwitz and came out as Jews. Africans went into the ships and came out as Blacks."[281] The question here is not, Wilderson points out, an attempt on either his or Fanon's part to argue that "Blacks are at the top of every empirical hierarchy of social discrimination" but rather to argue that there is a distinctly Black "grammar of suffering" that simply does not speak in the same register as, and is unheard by, others.[282] In this sense, Wilderson argues, again via Fanon, that White and Black grammars of suffering are incommensurate and irreconcilable, for the (undeniably real) suffering of the former is experiential but not, as Fanon unpacks, ontological. As Wilderson remarks, "Whiteness can also experience this kind of violence but only a fortiori: genocide may be one of a thousand contingent experiences of Whiteness but it is not a constituent element, it does not make Whites White (or Humans Human).[283] In this sense, Wilderson argues that Fanon opens a way of

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[279] Wilderson, *Red, White & Black,* 55. Wilderson's point that violence against non-Black Others is necessarily "contingent" (rather than gratuitous) is one I think worth unpacking further, but remains beyond the scope of this project. Suffice to note for now that I am less convinced, for instance, that violence against women is "contingent" on their "real or symbolic transgressions" against White male hegemony. However, his argument that White women are still positioned, or zoned, within the "Human" remains convincing, as is his point that this violence is not, at least in the same sense, "ontological."
[280] Ibid., 36-37. Emphasis mine.
[281] Ibid., 38.
[282] Ibid., 37.
[283] Ibid., 49.

thinking that distinguishes between a "conflict" *within* civil society, and a "structural antagonism" *against,* civil society.[284]

As we have seen, Fanon argued that the European humanist project was undergirded by hypocrisy and White supremacist violence. Wilderson takes this point further and makes it more explicit, arguing that Black enslavement and social death is what makes human (i.e. non-Black) life coherent and articulable, creating the Human subject.[285] As he puts it, "the questions of Humanism were elaborated in contradistinction to the human void, to the African qua chattel."[286] Wilderson also draws attention to the ways in which exploited White subjects turned to slavery as a metaphor to elaborate their own conflicts (within civil society) but in a way that that only further obscured the legibility of slave's position, to say nothing of improving it.[287] In this sense the "Slave" seems to function as the *perpetual* Other to "Human" political ontology, with Wilderson arguing that it is this Black *fungibility* which allowed Whites (and others) to imagine themselves as political subjects in a way that employed slavery as metaphor, allowing the "Human" to imagine "dreams of liberation which are more inessential to and more parasitic on the Black, and more emphatic in their guarantee of Black suffering, than any dream of human liberation in any era heretofore."[288]

Wilderson insists that anti-Blackness is not driven or constituted by the logic of political economy, but that anti-Blackness is the gratuitous violence that has made Human political ontology possible. Pointing out that while the economic costs would have been lower, White chattel slavery would have cost too much at the level of the "symbolic value" of Whiteness.[289] In contrast, the dehumanizing and gratuitous "violence of the Middle Passage and the Slave estate," and their subsequent incarnations, has been the violence that has made the Human subject knowable to itself: "Anti-Blackness manifests as the monumentalization and fortification of civil society against social death."[290] In this sense Black liberation is, in Wilderson's view, a question

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[284] Wilderson argues that other structural antagonism within the United States is the Indigenous position, given that Indigenous genocide, dispossession and "social death" is also constitutive of how they are structurally positioned vis-à-vis the Settler.
[285] Ibid., 20.
[286] Ibid., 19.
[287] Ibid., 21-22. By way of example Wilderson points to the French and American revolutions.
[288] Ibid., 22.
[289] Ibid., 15.
[290] Ibid., 55; 90. Wilderson draws on Hortense Spillers' theorization of the "Slave estate." For more see: Hortense Spillers, *Black, White and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.)

civil society is incapable of theorizing, for Black liberation implies a freedom *from* Humanity as it has been constituted, not simply from exploitation or alienation.[291]

Disentangling Fanon

In untangling "the ruse of analogy," Wilderson dissects Black, postcolonial, and Indigenous positions and narratives, elucidating some useful, salient distinctions between the dilemmas of slavery and colonization.[292] With respect to my question, Wilderson's approach also illuminates some significant differences in the possibility of dialectical movement in these contexts. As Wilderson quotes Orlando Patterson, "[The slave is] truly a genealogical isolate. Formally isolated in his social relations with those who live, he also was culturally isolated from the social heritage of his ancestors. He had a past, to be sure. But a past is not a heritage."[293] Here we see a critical resonance with Fanon's claim that compared to other foreign migrants in France, "There is nothing comparable when it comes to the black man. He has no culture, no civilization, and no 'long historical past.'"[294] In contrast, it would be hard to imagine Coulthard, whose project is articulated in terms of reclaiming a heritage and history which *precedes* the Settler, making a similar claim. Reading Fanon's work through later scholarship dealing with the constituent elements of slavery seems to point us more clearly toward why Fanon does not offer an adequate cultural politics for Coulthard's project, and helps elucidate why he finds négritude's historical posture so unsatisfying.

While much of *Black Skin, White Masks* has found important resonance among other colonized peoples (as Coulthard demonstrates through his engagement with Fanon on the politics of recognition and reconciliation), it is worth noting that the move to resurrect tradition in the name of sovereignty is one that Fanon believes is unavailable to him, and one which might, in Wilderson's reading, offer a kind of escape from the social death he describes. As Wilderson argues, "Sovereignty […] rescues the 'Savage' from the genealogical isolation of the 'Slave,"[295]

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[291] Ibid., 23.
[292] Ibid., 35.
[293] Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 5, quoted in Wilderson, *Red, White & Black,* 51.
[294] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 17.
[295] Wilderson, *Red, White & Black,* 51. Wilderson's point that the question of 'sovereignty' distinguishes the Indigenous from the Black position is a salient one. While he recognizes that both Black and Indigenous positions are 'structurally antagonistic' to the Setttler/Master/White position, Wilderson also offers a critique of Indigenous

rendering the Indigenous position articulable in a way that he maintains is not possible for the Black position.

Wilderson is also at pains throughout *Red, White and Black,* to distinguish between what we might call Fanon's postcolonial narrative, and the Master-Slave antagonism. Wilderson acknowledges, via Fanon, that while the two positions share a certain "'cleansing' relationship to violence,"[296] in that, as I have argued, violence inaugurates what Fanon understands as an explosion necessary to introduce a kind of 'ontological possibility.' However, Wilderson makes an important point that the postcolonial narrative is articulable, and proceeds, in a way that distinguishes it from the Black position. As he puts it, "The vulnerability of the postcolonials is open but not absolute: materially speaking, they carve out zones of respite by putting the Settler 'out of the picture,' whether back to the European zone or into the sea."[297] In contrast, Wilderson argues the condition of Black freedom is premised not on the need to "put the settler out of the picture," but rather, "their guarantee of restoration [is] predicated on their need to put the *Human* out of the picture."[298]

Wilderson still finds Fanon's "ventriloquizing on behalf of the postcolonial subject" useful in terms of elaborating his own project, drawing on Fanon's analysis of the spatial conditions of colonization in understanding the politics of ghettoization and mass incarceration in the United States.[299] However, the coherence of the demand for the return of land offers a kind of dialectical narrative that *Black Skin, White Masks* does not articulate. While the postcolonial and Indigenous narratives of struggle operate on a coherent (while contested and open) dialectic, Wilderson argues that to apply this retroactively to *Black Skin, White Masks* (and indeed Black struggle in general) obscures more than it clarifies the project of Black liberation. In his reading of American politically-motivated films (an important dimension of *Red, White & Black* which I admittedly do not address much here), Wilderson points to a critically flawed application of what

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thought that attempts to distinguish between a modality of sovereignty (more reconcilable with the Settler) and a modality of genocide (closer to the Black position) that I am less convinced holds when one considers how inseparable dispossession and genocide are in the settler-colonial context. For instance, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's "Decolonization is not a metaphor" *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1 no. 1 (2012) turns to Fanon to reveal an "ethic of incommensurability" between intra-Settler politics and Indigenous sovereignty in a way that *does* seem to elaborate upon the question Wilderson wishes to see posed by Indigenous ontologists: i.e. "how does our [Indigenous] absence from civil society […] elaborate your [Settler] presence?" (Wilderson, *Red, White & Black,* 161.)

[296] Ibid., 123.

[297] Ibid., 122.

[298] Ibid., 122. Emphasis mine.

[299] Ibid., 348-349, n. 47.

he calls Fanon's "postcolonial paradigm" to African-American struggles: "[T]his paradigm gave an object who possess no contemporaries, the Slave, the alibi of a subject who in fact possesses contemporaries, the postcolonial subject, so that the Slave might project his or her violent desire, cinematically, in a manner that could be understood and perhaps appreciated by spectators who were not Slaves."[300] While the postcolonial subject, in Wilderson's view, might experience social death under colonialism, the struggle for liberation realizes a new ontological position.

Of course, many postcolonial African nations are also Black, or predominantly Black nations. Wilderson's argument acknowledges that while the independence narrative of former African colonies shares certain similarities with that of other former colonized countries, insofar as Africans are positioned as Black to the world, the postcolonial narrative does not offer a resolution to global anti-Black racism. Wilderson's turn to Mbembe is illuminating on this question:

> Achille Mbembe argues that, once the slave trade dubs Africa a site of "*territorium nullius,"* "the land of motionless substance and of the blinding, joyful, and tragic disorder of creation," even Africans who were not captured are nonetheless repositioned as Slaves in relation to the rest of the world, the absence of chains and the distance from the Middle Passage notwithstanding. Though these "free" Africans may indeed still know themselves through coherent cultural accoutrements unavailable to the Black American, they are known by other positions within the global structure as beings unable to "attain to immanent differentiation or to the clarity of self-knowledge." To put a finer point on it, Saidiya Hartman writes: "Indeed, there was no relation to blackness outside the terms of this use of, entitlement to, and occupation of the captive body, for even the status of free blacks was shaped and compromised by the existence of slavery."[301]

Thus while Africans who were spared the horrors of the Middle Passage might know themselves in many different ways, not forced from their lands and kin, they remain positioned as Black vis-à-vis the White. To return to Fanon on this point, we can see a critical resonance with his assertion that "[t]he black man is unaware of [the "deep-rooted myth" of Black inferiority] as long as he lives among his own people; but at the first white gaze, he feels the weight of his melanin."[302]

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[300] Ibid., 121.
[301] Wilderson, *Red White & Black,* 95-96. Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 183, 176, 173. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection,* 25.
[302] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* 128.

Moreover, as he differentiates Black struggle from a postcolonial narrative which proceeds on the basis of restored sovereignty (which as Sekyi-Otu convincingly demonstrates, initiates in Fanon's thought a movement of class struggle and a move to the universal), Wilderson also distances the Black position from that of the worker as the subject of Marxism. Without denying that the labour of Black workers is exploited by capitalists, he argues that slavery and its afterlife positions Black subjects in a way that exceeds the logic of Marxism, and thus the demand of Black liberation is "in excess of the demand made by the worker."[303] In a similar vein, drawing on the work of Black feminists such as Hortense Spillers, Wilderson also argues that the demands of White feminism prove unable to understand the reproductive labour of Black women, because their relation to patriarchy and capital is fundamentally incommensurate: "Black feminists, like Hortense Spillers, insist, that the Black woman's relation to capital is not, in the first ontological instance, the wage relation of a subject but rather the fungible, violent, relation of an object."[304] Spillers describes enslavement as the "dehumanizing, ungendering, and defacing project of African persons."[305] As she argues, "in [this] historic outline of dominance, the respective subject-positions of 'female' and 'male' adhere to no symbolic integrity." [306] Spillers reminds us that White feminism's analysis of patriarchy and the family proves wholly inadequate in explaining or empowering the African-American woman placed "outside the traditional symbolics of female gender."[307] Black feminist analysis in this sense troubles feminism's imagined "universal" gendered subject.

An Agenda for Total Disorder

In Wilderson's reading of Fanon, which puts no stock in the possibility of dialectical transcendence, it appears to remain only Fanon's negative dialectic that might emerge, an "agenda for total disorder."[308] The question at hand becomes the abolition of Whiteness, or the "Human", not independence from the settler, which might offer an escape from social death.

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[303] Wilderson, "Gramsci's Black Marx: Whither the Slave in Civil Society?" *Social Identities,* 9, no. 2 (2003), 225-240, 230.
[304] Wilderson, *Red, White & Black*, 136.
[305] Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" *Diacritics* (Summer 1987), 72.
[306] Spillers, 66.
[307] Ibid., 80. For more Black feminist analysis on the question of enslavement see: Angela Davis, *Women, Race & Class* (New York: Random House, 1981).
[308] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 2.

Wilderson's turn to Fanon appears rather to be an attempt to make space for, and give license to the antidialectical moment of *total* rejection Fanon advocates in *Wretched of the Earth*, which is initiated "not in service of a higher unity."[309] Wilderson here is attempting to reflect on a structural positionality without putting faith in the possibility of future transcendence or historical logic. As my reading of Fanon has suggested so far, this seems well in keeping with Fanon's project, given that he argues the positive dialectic can only emerge and become clear once the moment of total rejection and rupture has been authorized and initiated. Returning to Fanon's understanding of history in light of Wilderson's intervention appears to point to the greatest lie of universal history, the very constitution of the "Human."

By centering what he reads as Fanon's understanding of the "noncommunicability" of Black suffering and liberation, Wilderson offers a renewed specificity to Fanon's analysis, offering a reading that pushes back against conflating the positions of "the Black" and "the colonized" subject.[310] Wilderson's reading undeniably results in reading Fanon against himself to a certain extent, particularly the Fanon who argues that, "[t]o believe one can create a black culture is to forget oddly enough that 'Negroes' are in the process of disappearing, since those who created them are witnessing the demise of their economic and cultural supremacy."[311] Given this has clearly not come to pass, it seems clearly appropriate to read Fanon's pessimism against his own optimism in the hope of some greater clarity.

In his conclusion to *Red, White & Black* Wilderson brushes away these contradictions within Fanon, particularly those more optimistic, dialectical moments, as Fanon distancing himself from the more radical conclusions of his own work:

> Frantz Fanon came closest to the only image of sowing and harvesting that befits this book. *Quoting Aime Césaire, he urged his readers to start 'the end of the world,' the 'only thing … worth the effort of starting,' a shift from horticulture to pyrotechnics.* Rather than mime the restoration and reorganization dreams which conclusions often fall prey to, however unwittingly, Fanon dreams of an undoing, however implausible, for its own sake. Still, there are moments when Fanon finds his own flames too incendiary. So much so that he momentarily backs away from the comprehensive

[309] Ibid., 4.
[310] Wilderson, *Red, White & Black,* 58. To be fair, this ambiguity is also visible in Fanon's own work, as in *Black Skin, White Masks*, where Fanon occasionally refers to his problem as a 'colonial' one in a more general sense.
[311] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 169.

> emancipation he calls for. Which is why one can find the Fanon of the Slave on the same page as the Fanon of the postcolonial subject.[312]

Here Wilderson brings us back to the moment of absolute rejection authorized by Fanon in *Wretched of the Earth*, but through the position of *Black Skin, White Masks*. The end of the "Human" as defined against the "Slave" necessarily implies the end of the world, not its reorganization.

It is worth acknowledging that there are other Black scholars engaging with *Black Skin, White Masks* on its own terms who prove more willing to think through Fanon's "New Humanism," and do not necessarily share Wilderson's pessimism with respect to Fanon's reading of ontological impossibility, and the negative dialectic which must necessarily emerge.[313] My intention here has not been to wade into these contentious debates. Rather, I have taken up Wilderson's analysis to illustrate an important set of questions that might arise when one takes a critical lens to Fanon's dialectic, dissecting points of continuity and difference across his work. While there is much in Wilderson that one might dispute (both in his reading of Fanon and in terms of his overall project), his pessimism is hardly a disavowal of Black agency. Rather, he seems to offer a clearing of rhetorical space for a struggle and project of liberation that takes it's cue from the position of "the Slave," which for Wilderson calls into question the very structure and foundations of civil society itself. Wilderson himself frames his project of one that is beginning to articulate the problem, and as he puts it: "the power to pose the question is the greatest power of all."[314] As political theorists take up Fanon's analysis in droves today, we would do well to bear in mind Wilderson's reminder that, "we must admit that the 'Negro' has been inviting whites, as well as civil society's junior partners, to the dance of social death for hundreds of years, but few have wanted to learn the steps."[315]

This chapter has looked at three distinct readings of Fanon, hoping to gain some further clarity on how we should be reading and applying Fanon's analysis of history today. It is clear

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[312] Wilderson, *Red, White & Black,* 337-338. Emphasis added.
[313] See for instance Gordon's *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man*, or Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its overrepresentation—An Argument." *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3.3 (2003): 257-337. Wynter would be particularly interesting to take further on these questions, given her work explores the historical moment in which colonialism, anti-Black racism, patriarchy, capitalism, and other systems of domination emerged without falling into what Wilderson calls "the ruse of analogy."
[314] Wilderson, *Red, White & Black,* 4.
[315] Wilderson, "The Prison Slave as Hegemony's (Silent) Scandal" *Social Justice,* 18-27, 30(2), 2003, 25.

that in many respects their analyses are informed by the political situations on which they bring his analysis to bear. Contemplating the failures of the African anti-colonial nationalist movements, Sekyi-Otu is preoccupied with resurrecting Fanon as a revolutionary humanist and proponent of a postcolonial universalism. Critiquing a colonial politics of recognition and reconciliation, Coulthard turns to Fanon to make a powerful case for the validity of Indigenous resentment, but finds him wanting on the question of Indigenous resurgence. Finally, hoping for a renewed Black militancy that calls into question not only the integrity of the United States, but of "Human" life itself, Wilderson offers us a return to Fanon as a theorist of Black and White structural antagonism. All three readings bring their own useful insights to bear on Fanon's thought. Nonetheless, I have argued here that Sekyi-Otu and Coulthard elide the question of *Black Skin, White Masks* by focusing their attention on Fanon's dialecticism. In this sense, Wilderson offers an important return to the foundational antagonism of Fanon's analysis in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Wilderson's work forces a profound reckoning with the (im)possibility of universal human history when our understanding of the "Human" as the subject of history has gained its fundamental coherence against the position of the "Slave."

In Conclusion

I'm not the bearer of absolute truths.

– Frantz Fanon

Where do these distinct and occasionally conflicting readings of Fanon leave us? Should Fanon lead his contemporary readers to a "bewildering enlightenment" or "the end of the world?" From the outset of *Black Skin, White Masks,* Fanon warns us he has "absolute truths" to impart.[316] Nonetheless, it is clear that decades after his death, Fanon's work still speaks to the present with an undeniable urgency.

In this work I have sought to examine Fanon's thinking about history and historical movement. By reading across his work it is clear that Fanon offers us a dialectical approach that is both open-ended in its application, and is committed to establishing the material conditions on which a move to the universal might be possible. In establishing these conditions, Fanon never writes off the necessity of the particular realizing itself on its own terms, rather than prematurely casting immediate demands into a dialectical movement towards the universal. In *Black Skin, White Masks* Fanon offers a response to Sartre that still resonates decades later, refuting the view that his struggle is valuable only for it's transitional role in service of a higher unity. Rather, Fanon reminds us, the "particular" demand is *its own project*. His vision of liberation is a struggle into a "New Humanism," *against* a construction of the "Human" premised on *dehumanization*. In *Wretched of the Earth* we see Fanon again emphasize the importance of honouring the immediacy of the demand for decolonization, reminding us that "[c]hallenging the colonial world is not a rational confrontation of viewpoints," but a bitter challenge between colonized and colonizer, structurally positioned against each other.[317]

While he is not prepared to discount the urgency of this demand, Fanon's prescient analysis also offers a critical warning of the failure to transcend this view. Authorizing an absolute repudiation of colonialism to inaugurate the re-entry of the colonized onto the stage of history, Fanon's vision nonetheless extends far beyond the mere reversal of colonialism's violent, racist Manicheanism, but a politics of universal empowerment beyond the false promise

[316] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* xi.
[317] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 6.

of nationalism. Fanon is likewise unwilling to entertain political projects that trample on Indigenous cultures in the name of modernization or resistance. In his vision, a genuine postcolonial universalism comes not through the denial of culture, but through the forging of shared struggle against colonialism, and common projects of empowerment in the wake of independence.

The readings of Fanon I address in the second chapter all offer thoughtful applications of Fanon's work to different situations. Reclaiming Fanon's open-ended dialectic offers Ato Sekyi-Otu a way to think through the ongoing challenges that Fanon predicted would emerge in the wake of colonialism. Of the three, Sekyi-Otu's reading is probably closest to my own in terms of the breadth of its concern. I share with Sekyi-Otu a certain understanding of the form of Fanon's thought with respect to the tension between particular and universal in his work, and I am deeply indebted to his insights. However, I also raised two critical points with respect to Sekyi-Otu's reading of Fanon. The first pertains to Fanon's understanding of Indigenous tradition, and the second to how the problematic of *Black Skin, White Masks* lacks the resolution Fanon finds in *Wretched of the Earth*.

Glen Coulthard's *Red Skin, White Masks* takes up Fanon's understanding of Indigenous tradition and history in a more critical analysis. While he finds useful insights in Fanon's work, he also notes an important limitation in Fanon's thinking when it comes to questions of culture and Indigenous resurgence. However, I also argue that Coulthard's engagement with Fanon is illustrative of the pitfalls of a reading that attempts to render consistent the dilemmas of Fanon's works, eliding the afterlife of slavery as a critical reference point for *Black Skin, White Masks*. Settler colonialism and enslavement are far more intertwined than this project has conceptualized, and continue to shape North American life (and indeed that of the world). However, I think drawing some salient distinctions is important in bringing further clarity to Fanon's work and how we might apply it today.

To this end, Frank Wilderson's *Red, White & Black* offers a highly original reading of Fanon that refocuses it's analytic on the question of slavery and social death in Fanon's work. My intention here has been to elucidate the useful distinction Wilderson draws between the dialectical movement in the postcolonial context, and what he reads as the ongoing ontological impossibility of *Black Skin, White Masks*. In this sense, Wilderson offers a return to the moment of total rejection in Fanon, a clearing of space for a life-restoring political demand that *undoes*

the coherence of civil society, rather than attempts to preserve it even through conflict. While Wilderson's approach does involve reading Fanon against himself, and self-consciously ignores the positive dimensions of his thought, I argue that his disarticulation of Fanon's work as a single political project brings a useful renewed specificity to his analysis and how it might be taken up today.

It is certainly true that we risk obscuring Fanon's dialectic if we fail to appreciate the movement between *Black Skin, White Masks* and *Wretched of the Earth* (no matter what one makes of the dialectic). But what I have attempted to do here, drawing on Wilderson, is to cast a critical lens back to what we might miss if we relegate *Black Skin, White Masks* to the dialectic of the later Fanon. To argue that Fanon's understanding of history and culture is reducible to his dialecticism, as Coulthard does, closes a door that it is, if anything, worth opening wider. If readers of Fanon allow themselves to be detained by what Sekyi-Otu calls the "aborted dialectic" of *Black Skin, White Masks*, rather than the ongoing dialectic of decolonization, we might be able to re-focus our attention on deeper and more intractable questions raised in Fanon's first work.

Turning to Fanon in an analysis of the African experience of neocolonialism, and the yet-unrealized promise of the anti-colonial resistance movements, Sekyi-Otu brings the reader back to Fanon's critical insight into how the spirit of this moment might be re-ignited in bringing about a more fundamental, universal transformation. Coulthard critically applies Fanon to thinking through Indigenous resurgence, thinking *past* Fanon in terms of understanding how Indigenous nations not only resist the colonial state, but what might be built in its stead. Finally, Wilderson returns us to Fanon as a thinker who sought to address the foundational antagonism of the "Human" and the "Slave," returning to a project that seeks to undo the world for its own sake, forcing us to confront whether the *explosion* which Fanon thought might come "too early... or too late" has yet to arrive.[318] As scholars and revolutionaries turn again to Fanon today it is worth bringing our attention to these opening lines of *Black Skin, White Masks*, recognizing the fundamental incompleteness of Fanon's project, and making space for the explosion it might require to complete it.

This project has turned out to raise more questions than it does offer any clear answers. The current wave of Fanon scholarship emerging in recent years holds great promise in terms of reaching some further clarity not just on what Fanon said, but also in terms of how we might take

[318] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* xi.

up his work in various contexts today. Movements against settler-colonialism and anti-Black racism, such as Idle No More, Black Lives Matter, among countless others, are also putting Fanonian questions back on the table in an important way. As revolutionary movements continue to think through and past Fanon's work, one might think of about the engagements I have addressed as in some sense representing the Ghost of Fanon Past, the Ghost of Fanon Present, and the Ghost of Fanon yet-to-come.

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